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VIDEO magazine

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Small Dishes Debut

First Look at 2 Systems
• How They Perform
• How To Get Started

FALL'S NEW PRODUCTS

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5 VIDEOTESTS

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RCA's 18-inch DSS dish and receiver atop a TV displaying the system's onscreen program guide. Photograph by Les Morsillo

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The Audit Bureau

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2 24X ZOOM

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CHANNEL ONE

TV power play

When a powerful bureaucracy imposes a foolish rule, the law of unintended consequences can frustrate both the rulemaker and the ruled. And this is exactly what's about to happen to TV sets. The bureaucracy is the U.S. Department of Energy, which Congress has ordered to set energy standards for appliances like water heaters and ovens. On its own, the department added TV sets to the list, and now appears poised to require manufacturers to cut TV power levels by about 30 percent.

It's easy to see how improving energy-gulping machines like refrigerators will save lots of watts. But lumping TVs with air conditioners and mobile-home furnaces is simply illogical. Making TVs more energy efficient won't improve TV shows. It will only lead to dimmer pictures, fewer features and less diversity as manufacturers lower tube voltage and purge sets of second tuners, hi-fi circuits and the like to shave a few watts off the bottom line. However, since viewers like bright pictures, good sound and varied features, the rule will only push such capabilities into external boxes that, ironically, will increase the power needed to fire up TVs. It could also hike the cost to viewers, who may have to buy an extra component to replace features TVs already include.

Adding to the irony is that manufacturers have cut TV power far more on their own than the Dept. of Energy would force them to do by fiat. A 20-inch set that gobbled 500 watts in the late '60s needs only about 100 watts today—one light bulb's worth of juice. Manufacturers say there's little margin left for shedding more watts without harming both set performance, and their own ability to export sets made here to less restrictive countries. Equally alarming, the rule could toss a monkey wrench into the progress of HDTV, interactive services and other advanced features that promise to dramatically change TV sets and TV viewing habits.

This is a classic act of misguided regulation. Fortunately, there's still time to back off. If you agree that the Dept. of Energy should power down, let us know and we'll forward your comments to the powers that be.

•

This month's cover story answers two questions we're frequently asked (often by unhappy cable customers): When will small satellite dishes be ready and where can I get one? Our look at the new Digital Satellite System and the somewhat larger Primestar system provides all the details you need to buy and install a dish and choose your programs.

We also take a hands-on look at high-end video and audio cables—yes, they do make a difference—and explore a curious little camcorder, the PXL-2000, that shoots black-and-white images on audiotape. Created as a toy, it's inspired young videomakers to devise spirited, low-budget tapes that are beginning to turn up in serious film and video festivals.

•

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Stan Pinkwas

Stan Pinkwas
Editor

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Corporate Offices, Editorial & Sales: Linda Futterman, Christine Barbieri, 460 West 34 St., New York, NY 10001; 212-947-6500, 212-947-6727 (fax)
West Coast Sales Office: Linda DeRogatis, Susan Kay Moses, 1453 Third Street, Suite 490, Santa Monica, CA 90401; 310-393-5057, 310-393-5538 (fax)
Chicago Sales Office: Milton Gerber, Kristene Richardson, Media Plus, 135 N. Arlington Heights Road, Suite 106, Buffalo Grove, IL 60089; 708-913-5400, 708-913-5403 (fax)

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Letters from our readers

Letterboxed

I was interested in the opinions expressed about letterboxing versus pan-and-scan in "Off The Air" (July). Originally, I disliked letterboxing (who needs a smaller image just to get that side junk?) until I obtained a couple of movies in both formats and ran A/B comparisons of scenes. Having to change my opinion was painful, but letterboxing won hands down. It wasn't even close.

John Hamaker,
Laguna Liguel, California

Power without memory

I was surprised to see that Timothy Liebe, in his "Camcorder" about how manufacturers are solving battery memory problems (May), failed to mention the first and most successful battery to address memory head on—our Lenmar NoMEM battery. Liebe briefly referred to the technology, but only as "the older lead acid cells." The fact is, lead acid batteries, which have no memory properties, continue to be used with all current VHS, VHS-C and S-VHS camcorder models. In fact, Hitachi and RCA introduced a 9.6-volt nickel cadmium battery for their VHS models but, after a short stint, reverted back to lead acid.

Manufacturers introduced nickel cadmium batteries for 8mm and VHS-C camcorders not because lead acid was "old technology," but because they were unable to get the capacity in the smaller physical size. The breakthrough offered by the Lenmar 6-volt NoMEM battery, which took five years to develop, is that it combines a longer run time (about two hours) with a small size. Also, it's compatible with original equipment chargers, and will never suffer from memory problems. So, while it's true there are newer technologies coming to address memory, it's our belief that no battery offers a better solution than the NoMEM.

Martin Goldberg
President, Lenmar Enterprises
Westlake Village, California

Lose the logos!

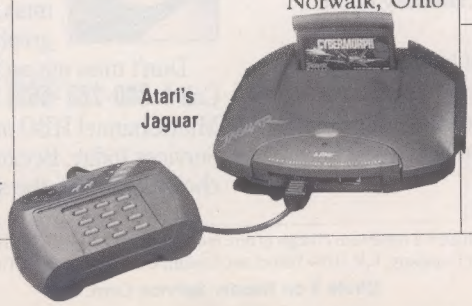
Until recently, I believed I was one of only a few people that had a problem with network logos in the lower corner of the TV screen. In your July reader survey ("Off the Air") I was surprised that, out of 54 gripes, network logos were listed as number one. Let us remember that it all started a few years back on the USA network, and that logos have since appeared on Family, Sci-Fi, CNN and several others. The worst offender, by far, is Comedy Central; I suspect that it displays its very large, full-color logo on the screen to distract viewers from the not-so-funny programming. If your readers are as ticked off as the survey suggests, perhaps they should inundate the networks with letters of protest. It may do some good.

Ken Koch
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Jilted Jaguar

For an article that was supposed to be about "systems primed for the information age" ("Multimedia Playground," Aug.), I thought you would have had more to say about the Atari Jaguar than a little side blurb. With its multiple 64-bit RISC processors, a DSP chip dedicated to audio, a palette of over 16.7 million colors, and an animation speed of 850 million pixels per second, the Jaguar easily outperforms every other system on the market. The Jaguar is a very powerful machine with a lot of potential, so give it a fair shot at the success it deserves.

Jeff Thompson
Norwalk, Ohio



Atari's Jaguar

Further tweaking

Thanks for Kevin Miller's article about tweaking TVs ("Home Theater," June). I was able to rent *A Video Standard* at a local disc shop. However, I had a problem in trying to adjust my TV—some TVs have Custom Picture Memory for input channels. If the adjustments are made using a laserdisc, a VCR or channels 91 or 92, the settings made for the other channels will not change. I was able to overcome this problem by recording the patterns onto a tape and playing it back on a coaxial input.

Jeff Ratliff,
Witchita, Kansas

Menu madness

Can someone tell me why we are being forced to accept onscreen programming? Recently I needed to replace my TV and bought the best Sony I could afford, the KV-32XBR96S. It is an onscreen control nightmare! Any adjustment triggers a menu or graphic display that interrupts viewing for everyone. Why would anyone in the future pay for the picture resolution of HDTV only to have it destroyed by these functions? I would pay extra for a separate LCD channel indicator and controls that stay where I set them.

Eugene Phillip,
Great Falls, Virginia

For the record

"Charge of the Lights Brigade" (Aug., page 46) should have stated that Sima's SL-6N light cuts battery life from 78 minutes to 33 minutes on a Panasonic PV-S62 camcorder. The data was omitted due to a printer's error.

Reader Ken Margeson points out that we incorrectly stated in "Power for Pennypinchers" (July) that the Sherwood RV-5030R A/V receiver uses an Analog Devices Pro-Logic chip. It actually uses a Sanyo chip. ■

Video Magazine welcomes your comments. Please include a phone number, but not a return envelope as the volume of mail does not permit replies. Letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address correspondence to Feedback, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.

Denon's lifelong philosophy of "Design Integrity" has led us to constantly improve audio quality in all phases of the reproduction chain—including circuitry for Home Theater. As a result, off-the-shelf IC components like those used by our competitors, are no longer good enough for Denon's AVR-2500 Audio/Video Receiver. The new Denon AVR-2500 features Dynamic Discrete Surround Circuitry, **D·D·S·C** which employs discrete surround circuitry plus an 18-bit digital converter in the DSP stage. (Most competitors use lower bit converters.)

Just as discrete components allow an audio system to be optimized for better sound, Denon's DDSC produces more accurate, more realistic surround sound by reducing Total Harmonic Distortion, by increasing Signal-to-Noise and minimizing DSP quantization noise.

AVR-1500

Naturally, the Denon AVR-2500 also features the latest audio and FM circuitry, such as multi-zone capability for playing different programs in different parts of your home and personal memory fields for one-button recall of your favorite, custom tailored surround sound stages. The AVR-2500 and AVR-1500 also feature the RDS *Smart Radio System*, which lets broadcasters offer you additional, invaluable information, services and conveniences, either on the front panel or via On-Screen Display on the AVR-2500.

RDS Radio Data System
"SMART RADIO"

Denon AV Receivers: DSP surround sound, advanced features *and* uncompromised High Fidelity.

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The First Name in Digital Audio

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INSTANT HOME THEA
JUST ADD YOUR TV AN

Panasonic introduces the amplifier, the speakers and the cabinet you need to bring home movie theater sound.

We know you.

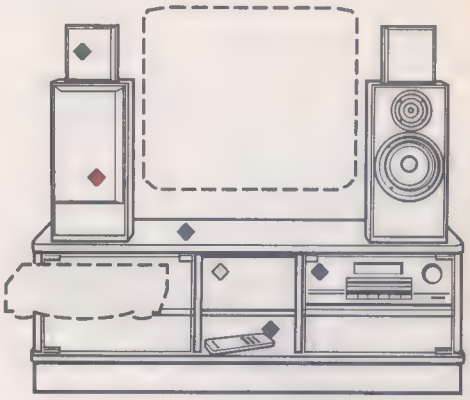
You love the idea of having movie theater sound at home. But you have no idea of what you should bring home.

Well, you're in luck.

Now Panasonic has put together a new home theater package that's simple, affordable and sounds just like the movies.

SC-HT500:

- *Audio/Video Rack*
- *Two front speakers*
- *Two rear speakers*
- *Built in center speaker*
- *Four-channel amplifier*
- *Preprogrammed remote*



The Panasonic SC-HT500.

As you can see, it has everything you need to enjoy realistic movie theater sound at home.

The heart of the package is a four-channel Dolby* Pro Logic amplifier. In the home theater mode, it sends 50 watts (1kHz, 8 ohms, 0.9% THD) of power to each of the four channels - left, center, right and surround.**

The three front speakers are perfectly matched, with the center speaker (built in to the cabinet) handling dialogue while the other two speakers reproduce music and sound effects.

And the two rear speakers complete the amazingly lifelike surround sound effect.

The modern, black cabinet can hold up to a 31" TV set, as well as three other components. Simply hook up the SC-HT500 to your TV, VCR or laser disc player and you're ready for a spectacular home theater experience. Instantly.

HOME THEATER

If you want movie theater sound at home, you'll love this package. If you want instant gratification, you'll love it even more.

*Dolby and the double-D symbol are trademarks of Dolby Laboratories Licensing Corp.
**When using videotape, laser disc or broadcast which is encoded with Dolby Surround.

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FAST FORWARD

Play ball

When PBS ran Ken Burns' epic video *The Civil War*, it was caught off-guard by the strong, immediate demand for videos. This year, it's taking no chances. Videotapes of *Baseball*, Burns' 18-hour history of the game, told in nine two-hour "innings," are coming out Sept. 23, during *Baseball*'s broadcast premiere—a rarity in a business where staggered release dates are the rule.

Burns has been working on *Baseball* for four years, searching through 250,000 feet of archival footage and 50,000 photos for the best way to tell a

story he calls "a secret history" of the U.S. "You will get to know the pure game behind the pro game we all know too well," he said.

The nine-volume set is $179.98, with individual innings $24.98. Fans can also indulge in a 512-page companion book and a collection of baseball songs on CD, and possibly look forward to a version on CD-ROM. **—Stan Pinkwas**

THE NUMBER

$216,000,000

The amount bid for 594 FCC licenses to broadcast interactive video and data services. Individual company bids ranged from $7,500 to $3.2 million.

THE COOLEST PLACE IN THE WORLD

The coolest place in the world—at least for myself, technical editor Lancelot Braithwaite and lots of other electronics enthusiasts—sits under some train tracks in Tokyo's Akihabara district. Here, in contrast to the flashy, multilevel electronics stores nearby, the ceilings are low and cluttered with conduit, the light is dim, and the aisles are packed. I have no idea what this place is called; if you read Japanese, maybe you can tell me. Whatever its name, this freewheeling market is probably the best source for electronics parts in the entire world.

Under one roof are dozens—maybe hundreds—of tiny stands, all of which sell electronic devices or parts. In one, you might find a choice selection of digital volt/ohm meters; in the next, esoteric multipin connectors for computers; in another, the best selection of videotape you've ever seen. And you're in good company: The place is crawling with electronics geeks from all over the globe.

Over the years, every electronics do-it-yourselfer compiles a mental list of parts he or she has *never* been able to find. At the Akihabara market, I reduced my list by three. I finally found some high-quality, 1/4-inch stereo right-angle plugs, something I've been seeking for 10 years. I also snagged a handful of S-video plugs and one of the five-pin connectors used for LANC edit controllers, neither of which Lance or I have ever been able to find in the U.S. Some unusual screwdrivers and a bunch of cheap Yugoslavian tubes for my antique Heathkit amp drained my remaining supply of yen; had I had another $200, I could happily have spent it in five minutes.

—Brent Butterworth

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"There are people who would grab the lighted end of a flaming stick—coincidentally, these are the same people who would like to see government funding of videogames."

—PENN JILLETTE
of the comedy and magic team
Penn & Teller

3-D comes to Toon Town

▶▶ A pair of 3-D glasses appears briefly on the screen as Ziv Zulander commands his robotic entourage—as well as his TV audience—to begin "laser time." During this sequence in the animated series *The Bots Master*, the good and evil characters go to war while viewers watch through the transforming lenses of Nuoptix 3-D glasses. Airing in syndication on weekdays, *The Bots Master* is a novelty in itself. Ziv, his sister Blitzy and the rest of the Bots make up the first animated 3-D television series. Yet, what is distinctive about the 3-D used in *Bots Master* 3-D is not merely the images that you do see, but those that you don't.

E-Z 3-D: For a 3-D effect, the *Bots Master* animators use constantly shifting fore- and backgrounds.

The Nuoptix 3-D TV process allows viewers to watch with or without the special glasses. The reason? According to Nuoptix inventor Terry D. Beard, the process "does not use pairs of images to create the 3-D effect but relies on the viewer's perception of motion and 3-D." The Nuoptix process is made possible by the continuous movement and changing perspective of the characters or the camera, as well as by the viewing glasses. (Nuoptix glasses, available in toy stores, have one clear and one dark lens; normal red and blue 3-D glasses are not as effective for watching the show.)

While the program cannot be viewed in 3-D without the glasses, it nevertheless appears clean, free of double images and, at times, in deep perspective. On the other hand, the effect of viewing old 3-D films, like *It Came from Outer Space*, without special glasses is somewhat like looking at a video image cross-eyed.

However, laser time is fleeting. As if one's last quarter were used up at the local arcade, Ziv Zulander signals the end of the 3-D sequence with "Game over, boyzz." In fact, "The whole concept of 'playing' is emphasized in the cartoon, in catch phrases such as 'laser time' and 'game over'," stated Mark Taylor, executive vice-president of Jet Lag, which licenses the program. Taylor suggests that the passive, purely visual engagement of animated TV programs like *The Bots Master* may eventually be replaced by programs that allow active participation—the third dimension complete with viewing glasses and a joystick.

—Janeen Renaghan

Elvis' Dream Toy: Next time you're so frustrated with lousy prime-time shows that you want to shoot your TV, call 800-684-3324 to find the name of the nearest Gunvertor dealer. The $70 Gunvertor functions as a universal remote control, with the trigger reserved for channel-changing.

TIMESHIFT

TEN YEARS AGO IN VIDEO MAGAZINE

"On a midsummer night we unpacked an RCA Colortrack 2000 stereo TV set and dreamed of hot sounds coming from its speakers. It was July 26, and *Video* staffers were to meet in Technical Editor Lance Braithwaite's cramped office some time before 11:30 p.m. in the hopes of hearing the first network broadcast in MTS stereo, of *The Tonight Show*. We displayed a modest amount of emotion when the red stereo light at the top of the set went on, but our first reviews were mixed. We suspect the effect will improve when most of us own stereo TVs. We're making a big to-do about all this, naturally, because stereo TV will be taken for granted in years to come...Pioneer's soon-to-be-announced CLV900 won't record, but it will play both CDs and laserdiscs...K-Tel Video's *Breakdance* not only shows you how to "break" with specific instruction and examples, but also includes segments from *Breakin'*, released theatrically last spring...Wouldn't it be great if the operating functions of all your audio and video components were completely controllable from a single remote? And if you could combine their functions—say, record an LP on your audio cassette deck while taping a cable show on your VCR—why, that would be even better, right? Dimensia, RCA's new audio-video component line, is the first system to let you do all the above and more. A normally mild-mannered *Video* editor waxed ecstatic when treated to a sneak preview of the system recently. Rumor has it that RCA will even tell us which CED player we'll be able to integrate with Dimensia." ■

OCTOBER 1984

WHY BUY HIGH-PERFORMANCE SPEAKERS?

"Great loudspeakers make great systems come alive. The loudspeaker is the only component that actually produces the sound we hear. Given the quality of digital sources and available amplification, increasing the loudspeaker budget nearly always provides the most demonstrably audible improvement."

Chris Browder, B&W Loudspeakers, President of AAHEA

"High performance loudspeakers reveal so much more of the soundtrack's detail, dynamics, and impact that the listening experience becomes much more lifelike, involving, and enjoyable. It's like bringing the performers into your home."

Jim Thiel, THIEL

"In their pursuit of perfection, dedicated audio manufacturers have developed high-fidelity loudspeakers with performance capabilities far beyond movie theater standards. We believe that the accuracy and realism of these speakers can significantly improve A/V systems. Speakers that realistically reproduce an orchestra and a singer will also realistically reproduce film effects and dialog."

Richard Vandersteen, Vandersteen Audio, Inc.

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AAHEA

This column is presented by The Academy for the Advancement of High End Audio (AAHEA), an organization dedicated to the recognition of excellence and the promotion of greater awareness of high end audio.

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Late Breaking News

LOOK FOR recoton to come out early next year with headphones that harness the new technology of active noise cancellation, a way of generating noise to erase background sounds so that music and speech sound clearer.

•

SILIWOOD? THAT'S WHERE Hollywood meets Silicon Valley, according to one Sega official. The evidence it's happening? Sega and MGM are collaborating on a new CD-ROM game. Although the companies won't release details of the project, it will include live actors, sets suitable for feature films and a budget estimated at $5 million. Look for it on small screens early next year.

•

QUICKTIME, APPLE COMPUTER's digital movie format, will turn up as the software component in TV-top boxes planned by Bell Atlantic for its full-service telecommunications network. The company has decided to include Quicktime in its $11 billion proproject to deliver video, phone and multimedia services in several East Coast states.

•

3DO PLAYERS WILL SOON HAVE the option of saving their games in mid-play and resuming later thanks to a Memory Card planned by TDK for early next year. The card and a card reader will use flash memory technology to boost storage capacity. It will run off the 3DO Multiplayer's expansion port and should cost about $100.

•

THERE'S STILL A LITTLE TIME to enter this year's Tokyo Video Festival, sponsored by JVC. Videotapes up to 20 minutes long in half-inch or three-quarter-inch formats are eligible. Top prizes include $4,000 plus a trip to Japan for two. Call 201-794-3900 for an application. The deadline for entry is Sept. 30.

•

THE VIDEO INDUSTRY AIDS ACtion Committee, a volunteer fund-raising group, expects to raise about $500,000 this year, which is as much as its combined total since it's start in 1989. The funds are donated to numerous AIDS organizations in the U.S. and Canada.

THE DAVID SARNOFF Research Center has teamed up with Texas Instruments on a four-year, Pentagon-funded project to develop the latter's unique projection technology. The system displays images by using a silicon structure supporting more than two million "micro-mirrors" designed to pivot on tiny hinges. Voltage changes in tiny electrodes beneath the mirrors mechanically control their tilt to project detailed digital pictures.

•

WHO SAYS KLINGONS ARE SECond-class citizens? The alien warriors will get their own CD-ROM early next year now that Paramount's broke the ice with *The Next Generation Interactive Technical Manual*, a clips-and-effects disc that explores the format's potential as a medium for Trekkers. Also on tap for the CD-ROM-ulans over at the studio: An interactive version of the *Star Trek Encyclopedia*.

•

WHAT'S A SPIDER, A DARK CLIP, a saw filter, a delta factor? You can find out in the new fourth edition of the *Product Terminology Dictionary*, a 111-page, $4.50 guide to things audio/video from the Electronic Industries Assoc. in Washington, D.C. (202-457-8700 for more info). The dictionary's also available in DOS- and Mac-format discs. A spider, by the way, is the loudspeaker part that holds the voice coil in place.

•

IN A SIGN OF TIMES TO COME, Radio Shack has opened its first store in Russia—an outlet on Moscow's Leninsky Prospect. A company spokesman says the store is the first of several and carries the chains' full line of products.

•

VCRS ARE NOW IN 91 PERCENT of U.S. households according to Electronic Industries Association figures. ■

EYES ON SONY

There has never been a better time to buy a new VCR. Major improvements in audio and video performance are leading millions of consumers to trade-in for newer models, or to add second units for other rooms in their houses. A close-up look at the latest selection of VCRs from Sony offers an excellent indication of how far video technology has evolved since this company introduced the first home videocassette recorder nearly 20 years ago. Since that time, Hi-Fi Stereo Sound has become an especially important feature, while picture quality enhancements and user-friendly controls have proliferated. Because of these recent technical developments, three new Sony VCRs (and one laserdisc machine) were selected for review in this "Eyes-On Report."

SONY SLV-720HF HI-FI STEREO VCR

IF YOU'RE SERIOUS about quality and convenience from a VCR, Sony's SLV-720HF Hi-Fi stereo VCR will handle the tasks required.

It features the modern, no-nonsense cabinet design that the new Sony VCRs share. The front panel is uncluttered, with a concealed tape door, LCD display panel, Sony Shuttle control, power, record and eject buttons.

The device is easy to hook up to a TV or home theater system with its simple, uncluttered back panel jackfield. Once up and running, video and audio performance are optimum thanks to several significant technology improvements.

Most readily apparent is better picture quality. Thanks to Dual Azimuth 4-head design, recording and playback are improved over 2-head designs. Colors are true and images are clear. A/B comparisons between the new Sony and another two year old model showed much better contrast, truer red reproduction and finer edge details.

In addition, the unit provides clear freeze frame capability, along with ultra clear slow motion with a minimum of picture jitter. A special Tape Stabilizer design in the smooth-operating transport is there to minimize picture jitter at all times and aids in the gentle, yet fast handling of the tape. Digital auto tracking is designed to ensure that every tape is playing back at its full potential.

The Rapid Access Tape Transport system produced a picture almost as soon as our fingers came off the play button, and the engineers also have been able to reduce response time between functions.

Meanwhile, it is extremely easy to operate. The Sony Shuttle has become standard on the entire new Sony line and it makes VCR operation a much friendlier experience. It's featured on the full-function remote as well as on the deck and it handles up to 13 separate operations, providing easy and accurate control of all major tape functions including: slow motion, frame advance, and search (all in forward and reverse), as well as play, stop, fast forward and rewind. The system is ergonomic to use and intuitive to operate.

The SLV-720HF's built-in VCR Plus+ programming capability makes getting the VCR ready to tape up to eight events in a 1-month period as easy as dialing the phone. Sony's on-screen menus guide the user quickly and easily through all functions — and they've been designed to be more pleasant to the eye. The unit also features Cable Box Control, which lets your VCR change channels on your cable box when you are not home for timer recording, as well as when you're watching TV through your VCR.

Other features include: Auto Head Cleaner to maintain the life of the heads without you having to do anything in that regard; Skip Search, which advances the tape 30 seconds at the touch of a button; linear counter; and Auto Preset Tuner with Express Tuning System.

And how does it sound? It made the most of the Hi-Fi stereo sound quality that we played back through a 100 watt per channel Dolby Pro-Logic amplifier, and five speaker surround system.

For a truly good all-around VCR, with high performance and ease-of-use, check the SLV-720HF out at your dealer soon.

SLV-720HF SPECIFICATIONS

Format: VHS
Recording Speeds: SP/EP
Playback Speeds: SP/EP/LP
Channel Coverage: VHF: 2-13; UHF: 14-69; Cable:1-125
Total Channels: 181
Antenna Terminals: 75-ohm "F" type
Video Heads: Double Azimuth 4-head system
Video Signal-To-Noise Ratio: Better than 45 dB
Dynamic Range: More than 90 dB (VHS Hi-Fi)
Frequency Response: 20 - 20,000 Hz (VHS Hi-Fi)
Wow And Flutter: Less than 0.005% (WRMS, VHS Hi-Fi)
Video Input: Phono type (1)
Video Output: Phono type (1)
Audio Input: L/R Phono type (1)
Audio Output: L/R Phono type (1)
Timer Clock: Crystal locked 12-hour cycle with 3 hour backup
Programmability: 8 events/1-month
Power Requirements: 120 V AC, 60 Hz
Power Consumption: 21 Watts (maximum)
Weight: 11 lbs., 4 oz (5.1 kg)
Dimensions: 17" x 4" x 14 3/4" (430 x 100 x 375 mm)
Supplied Accessories: RMT-V140 UniCommander Remote Control (with two AA-size batteries); Cable Mouse infrared repeater; 75-ohm Coaxial Cable; Audio/Video Connecting Cord; AC Power Cord; Instruction Manual

SONY SLV-770HF HI-FI STEREO VCR

THIS NEW MODEL is one of Sony's top line units and it lives up to that status. For the discriminating consumer, the SLV-770HF's recording and playback quality are optimal, thanks to these sophisticated monitoring circuits. Colors are bright and images are clear. Any differences between the audio of the Hi-Fi VCR and a laserdisc machine playing the same title was indecipherable to most ears.

Sony has introduced the "smart" VCR here. The unit actually monitors its own recording quality and makes the appropriate adjustments. The result? Picture quality that goes beyond what you might expect from the VHS format.

The LS Feature Package is a combination of automatic capabilities that make using this VCR easy. For instance, no more wisecracks about your VCR flashing at 12:00. Auto Clock Set automatically sets the clock to the correct time, resets for Daylight Savings Time, leap year, etc., from data gathered from broadcast/cable signals (where available). Auto Station ID automatically displays station call letters of compatible TV broadcasts (where available). "Context-Sensitive" on-screen displays feature enhanced color menus. For consumers who are afraid of electronics, who don't like lots of buttons, or who don't read owner's manuals, these menus coach them every step of the way and, once mastered, the operations are intuitive.

Meanwhile, the unit sports the growingly popular VCR Plus+ programming feature, Commercial Skip, which automatically advances the tape 30 seconds at the touch of a button, and Sony's Cable Mouse remote repeater which allows the VCR remote to control channel selection on most cable boxes during normal TV viewing and also permits timer recording of more than one scrambled cable channel.

The Sony Shuttle is quickly becoming a standard for intuitive VCR ooperation. After using the control, we found no need to look at the control to perform its functions. The Electronic Tab Marker Indexing System enables quick access via fast forward or rewind to the start of recorded sections: Index Scan mode scans up to 19 index marks in sequence. The linear tape counter indicates tape position in hours, minutes and seconds of real time.

The Adaptive Picture Control tests each tape and adjusts recording parameters for best performance and it also adjusts playback for ideal balance. In tests with old tapes that were recorded on antiquated equipment, we were surprised at how well the unit brought the most out of them picture-wise. Dual azimuth 4-head design adds more assurance of optimum picture quality. In addition, Narrow Width Video Head design improves picture quality in EP (Extended Play) mode. Comparing long-play tapes between the SLV-770HF and VCRs without this feature proved it does tend to bring out the best from them.

With its front panel inputs, the Sony 770HF makes an ideal editing companion to any camcorder. Its tape transport seems to be highly responsive and robust. High-speed rewind lets you rewind a T-120 tape in about half the time it takes for a typical VCR to do so. A Control "S" input is on board for use with optional A/V controllers, editing equipment and other VCRs equipped with a Control "S" output. Additionally, the SLV-770HF has an Edit Switch that optimizes picture quality for tape-to-tape editing and front panel jacks for hooking up a camcorder or other component.

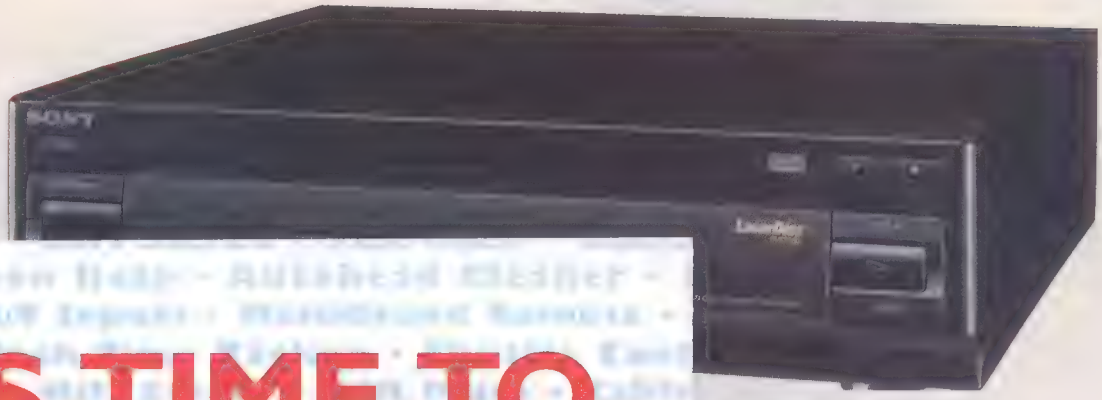
This is a highly versatile VCR that has been loaded with features for virtually every home use.

SLV-770HF SPECIFICATIONS

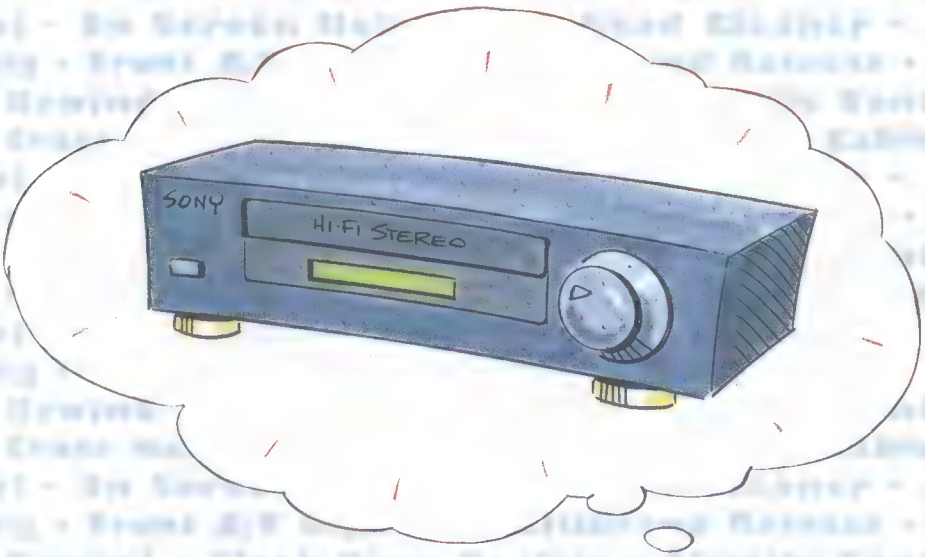
Format: VHS
Recording Speeds: SP/EP
Playback Speeds: SP/EP/LP
Channel Coverage: VHF: 2-13; UHF: 14-69; Cable:1-125
Total Channels: 181
Antenna Terminals: 75-ohm "F" type
Video Heads: Double Azimuth 4-head system
Video Signal-To-Noise Ratio: Better than 45 dB
Dynamic Range: More than 90 dB (VHS Hi-Fi)
Frequency Response: 20 - 20,000 Hz (VHS Hi-Fi)
Wow And Flutter: Less than 0.005% (WRMS, VHS Hi-Fi)
Video Input: Phono type (1 front, 1 rear)
Video Output: Phono type (1)
Audio Input: L/R Phono type (1 front, 1 rear)
Audio Output: L/R Phono type (1)
Timer Clock: Crystal locked 12-hour cycle with 3 hour backup
Programmability: 8 events/1-month
Power Requirements: 120 V, 60 Hz
Power Consumption: 25 Watts (maximum)
Weight: 11 lbs., 7 oz. (5.2 kg)
Dimensions: 17" x 4" x 14 3/4" (430 x 100 x 375 mm)
Supplied Accessories: RMT-V140A UniCommander Remote Control (with two AA-size batteries); Cable Mouse infrared repeater; 75-ohm Coaxial Cable; Audio/Video Connecting Cord; AC Power Cord; Instruction Manual

SLV-920HF

The SLV-920HF is Sony's top-of-the-line VHS deck. The company has loaded it with every imaginable feature, most of which are also being made available on the SLV-770HF. This Hi-Fi Stereo VCR contains the entire LS Feature Package, as well as the Sony Cable Mouse System and VCR Plus+. A VCR Selector Switch permits more than one Sony VCR to be used in the system. The big differences between the 770 and 920 models are essentially two valuable features — flying erase head and audio/ video insert capability. These two editing options are extremely important for anybody who wants to give their home video productions and tape compilations that professional look, offering much cleaner transitions, inserts and cuts.



IT'S TIME TO BUY YOUR NEXT VCR



PRESENTED BY VIDEO MAGAZINE

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.AYER

other components from the remote.
; a movie on laserdisc in the home theater on the
s truly a remarkable experience. In addition,
liscs, you can scan the discs forward or reverse
esired point clearly. Laserdiscs' picture quality
sound are great for material you buy and keep
rent for the night — especially music videos,
ıd classic films. In addition, random access and
to play discs over and over without wear makes
ct medium for children's movies.
iences abound. For instance, this unit features
se, which means that you don't have to get up
ıour and turn a 12-inch motion picture disc
one side has come to its end. The machine
lly does it for you with a minimum of interrup-
also offers the convenience of Auto Resume; if
is interrupted by real life, turn off the player
you return and turn the player back on, it
lly commences play where you left off. Quick
k Reverse provides faster laserdisc response.
Protection keeps the disc flat by disengaging
when you press Stop. On-screen displays let
the status of functions, while the full-function
ımmander puts all operations at your finger-
:an also peruse discs via Frame/Time Search
Direct Chapter/Track Search. You also have
repeat for laserdiscs and two-way repeat for
Sony's Automatic Chapter Sensor/Automatic
ıor system skips forward or backward to LD
CD tracks.
MDP-500 AV laserdisc player is great entertain-
great value. It provides an affordable laserdisc
double-side play and Sony quality.

o 425

Than

ohms,

: 200
ion);

GENERAL

Power Requirements: 120 VAC, 60 Hz

Power Consumption: 40 W

Dimensions (WHD): 17 x 4 5/8 x 16 1/2" (430 x 117 x 420.5 mm)

Weight: 22 lbs.

Supplied Accessories: RMT-M23A Remote Commander Remote Control with 2 AA batteries; Audio and video connecting cords; AC power cord; instruction manual

SONY SLV-770HF HI-FI STEREO VCR

THIS NEW MODEL is one of Sony's top line units and it lives up to that status. For the discriminating consumer, the SLV-770HF's recording and playback quality are optimal, thanks to these sophisticated monitoring circuits. Colors are bright and images are clear. Any differences between the audio of the Hi-Fi VCR and a laserdisc machine playing the same title was indecipherable to most ears.

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Channel Coverage: VHF: 2-13; UHF: 14-69; Cable: 1-125
Total Channels: 181
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SLV-920HF
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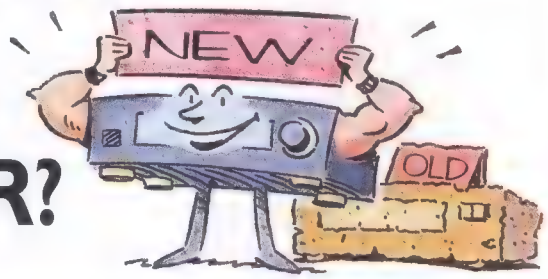
Is it time to buy a new VCR?



Q. Why are so many of my friends buying new VCRs?

A. Recent industry figures for new VCR sales indicate that a large number of consumers are either replacing their old VCRs or buying additional decks for use around the home. Many of these shoppers are being surprised by the numerous refinements that have taken place in VCR technology since they bought their last machines. Certainly, they are asking more questions about programming options, HiFi Stereo Sound, convenience features and picture quality. That's why *Video Magazine* and Sony have teamed up to produce this indispensable VCR Buyer's Guide. Let us help you choose the VCR that's right for you.

BUYING TIP: VCR Plus+™ makes programming a VCR as simple as dialing a phone number.

VCR Plus+

Q. How have VCRs changed since I bought my last one?

A. Today's VCRs offer substantial improvements in audio and video performance — in addition to being much easier to operate. With consumers renting and buying over $10 billion worth of stereo prerecorded movies per year, the HiFi Stereo Sound feature is critical to get the most out of your movie rentals. One other important difference is that most new VCRs have four video heads, for providing superior picture quality and special effects. Today's VCRs are also more user-friendy.

Q. Why is now the right time to trade up or replace my VCR?

A. Probably because there has never been a better time in terms of the quality and selection of product. VCR technology has come a long way since Sony debuted the world's first home videocassette recorder nearly 20 years ago. The current generation of VCRs

are easier to use, better performing, and a great value.

Q. What are some of today's hot VCR features?

A. The range in VCR features these days is truly astounding. Even some "basic" models sport pretty impressive lineups with features such as:

- built-in VCR Plus+ timer programming
- on-screen help menus
- automatic digital tracking and head cleaning
- real-time tape counters
- automatic channel preset (eliminates the need to set up the VCR's internal tuner)

The feature count really soars on the high end, where the additional offerings include:

- shuttle control and shuttle remote
- automatic clock set
- cable box control
- rapid access transport with high-speed rewind
- multibrand unified remotes
- adaptive picture control for improved picture quality
- camcorder-friendly editing and front-panel inputs

Then, of course, there is the outstanding audio performance offered by the HiFi Stereo feature.

Q. What's so special about HiFi Stereo? I have an old stereo VCR, isn't that the same thing?

A. Not at all. Early "stereo" VCRs (which, by the way, are no longer manufactured) used the conventional narrow audio track located on the outside edge of the videotape; that's the track still used by all monaural VCRs. The HiFi Stereo system, however, strips in audio information along the full width of the tape, just like a video signal, resulting in high-quality sound when connected to a home stereo system or stereo TV. The HiFi Stereo feature is also essential for playing back the phenomenal sound tracks found on most movie rentals. In addition, HiFi Stereo VCRs allow you to receive and record MTS (stereo TV) broadcasts.

VHS HiFi STEREO

BUYING TIP:
HiFi Stereo offers near-CD quality sound, making a HiFi VCR a critical part of any home theater.

.AYER

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GENERAL

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Power Consumption: 40 W

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Weight: 22 lbs.

Supplied Accessories: RMT-M23A Remote Commander Remote Control with 2 AA batteries; Audio and video connecting cords; AC power cord; instruction manual

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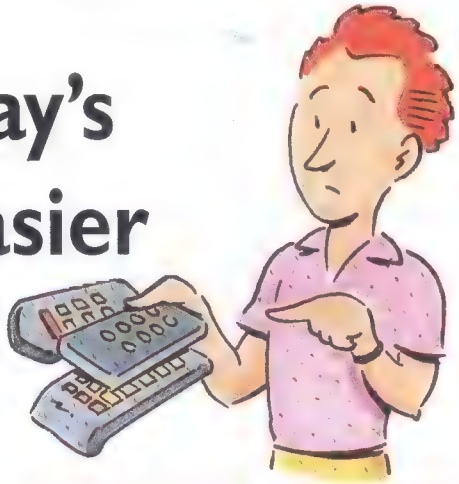

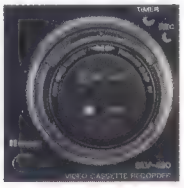

BUYING TIP: The Sony Shuttle Control is designed to operate Play, Stop, FF, Rewind, Search, Frame Advance, in forward and reverse directions — with one simple, fun control.

Q. Is there anything I can do to prevent adding yet another remote control to my collection?

A. Indeed there is. Many manufacturers have responded to consumers' growing "remote" concerns by packaging VCRs with unified remote controls that operate TVs and other components in home entertainment systems. Be forewarned, though: the level of wireless flexibility can vary from deck to deck. While some unified VCR remotes will control most major-brand TVs, others will only work with TVs made by the same manufacturer. So, if this is an important consideration for you, be sure to clarify the remote's capabilities before making your purchase.

Q. Should I expect to find the same type of controls as I'm using with my current model?

A. Yes and no. You will probably find that there are fewer controls overall — which are typically hidden behind a flip-down panel, creating a noticeably cleaner faceplate. And many set-up functions are done via the on-screen menu system. Sony has made its VCRs easier to operate with a single, rotary Shuttle Dial that governs all the basic operating functions.

Q. What exactly does the Shuttle Dial do?

A. It is very easy and intuitive to use. In addition to controlling the play, stop, rewind and fast forward functions, the Shuttle also operates all special effects — from frame-by-frame advance, slow motion, normal-speed play, and 2X normal speed, to high-speed picture search. Turn it in the opposite

direction, and you get all these modes in reverse. For added convenience, the Shuttle control is found on both the front panel of the VCR and the supplied wireless remote.

Q. Do I need to consult the manual each time I want to use the VCR?

A. Not unless you feel like brushing up on your reading. Fortunately, some VCRs today offer some type of on-screen help menu designed to display the needed operational information on your TV monitor. Of course, some menus are more comprehensive than others — and some are simply easier to understand. The most advanced ones offer "context sensitive" systems wherein the VCR actually follows the procedure being performed in order to provide the exact information required.

Q. I want a model that's easy to program. Anything new in this department?

A. In the past, time-shifting (programming a VCR to record at a later date or time), was widely viewed as one of the most vexing tasks a consumer could face. Fortunately, there's been some significant progress made on that front. In addition to programming menus that walk the user through each step of the programming process, some new models also come equipped with built-in VCR Plus+ programming, which uses PlusCode™ program numbers (found in over 600 newspapers as well as *TV Guide*) to make timer recording as simple as dialing a phone number.

Q. Have they figured out a way to do away with the infamous "blinking 12:00" VCR clock?

A. The good news is that this crucial clock setting function is now easily addressed via many VCRs' on-screen help functions. Two new Sony models utilize date and time signals from TV broadcasts from local PBS stations (where available) to automatically set their own clocks! Another useful feature is a clock/timer backup system, which preserves clock and timer settings for up to three hours in the event of a power failure.

Cable Mouse®

BUYING TIP:
Cable Box Control lets your VCR change channels on your cable box when you are not home for timer recording.

.AYER

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How can I get improved VCR performance?

Auto Clock

BUYING TIP: Auto Clock Set uses date and time signals from TV broadcasts to automatically set a VCR clock.

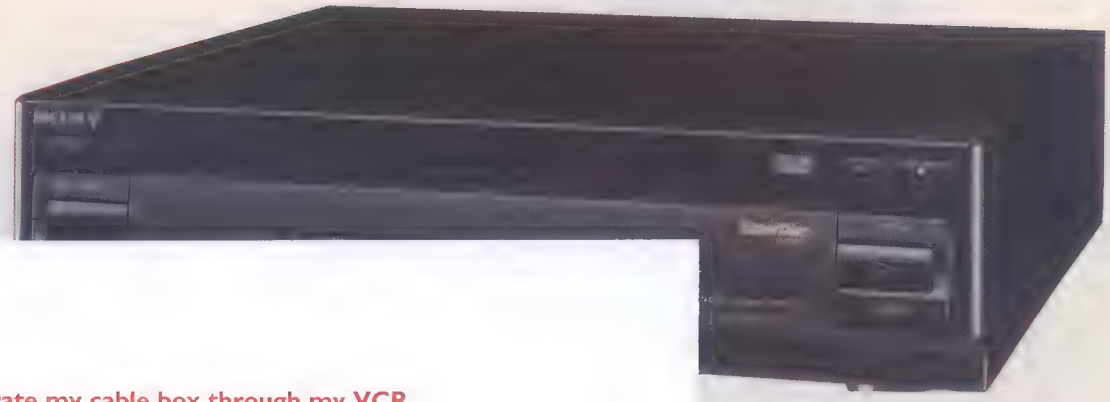
Q. How does a VCR fit into a home theater system?

A. Home theater is an increasingly popular concept in which consumers are integrating their audio and video systems to recreate the movie-going experience in their own homes. Obviously, the ability to record and playback movies is an integral part of most home theater systems. But just any old VCR won't do for such applications. Once again, the HiFi Stereo function is a must-have for playing back prerecorded movies with HiFi Stereo Sound that adds to the excitement and drama of watching movies at home. By connecting your VCR's audio outputs to the stereo system, your listening room turns into a theater. Other essentials include a true multibrand remote control for operating other system components.

Q. Are there any other new developments in enhancing picture quality?

A. Four-head VCRs are now the norm, offering better picture quality in special effects modes. Meanwhile, some new upscale Sony models offer an Adaptive Picture Control (APC) that automatically adjusts for the optimal recording and playback characteristics of each tape. In the Record mode, the VCR test records (in less than a second) on each new tape to automatically balance tape quality and head wear for the best picture performance. In playback mode, the VCR adjusts itself automatically for best quality. Other innovations include the use of narrow width video heads, which, with APC, provide improved picture quality in the EP mode, tape stabilizer mechanisms (which promote smooth tape motion and reduce picture jitter) and automatic head cleaning and digital tracking functions.

EYES-ON REPORT



Q. I want to operate my cable box through my VCR remote. Is that possible with any new machines?

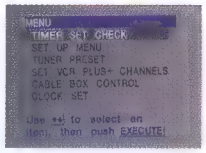
A. Cable Box Control is fast becoming one of today's most sought-after VCR features. This feature lets you change the channels on your cable box with your VCR remote. Sony's Cable Mouse® Cable Box Control will also allow you to record more than one scrambled or unscrambled channel during timer recording. It also allows you to place the cable box almost anywhere.

Q. Exactly what is tracking, and why do I need to be concerned about it?

A. The tracking control regulates tape movement across the video heads and, in essence, is responsible for keeping the picture steady on your screen. Due to variations in the production of prerecorded videos, it is important to adjust the tracking for each individual tape. In older models, this was accomplished by manually turning the tracking control. In many newer VCRs, however, this task is handled automatically with digital control for maintaining accurate tracking adjustment throughout the entire playback process.

Q. Okay. But should I expect to pay much more for these innovative, new features?

A. The biggest innovation of all is the fact that today's VCRs are a tremendous value. Manufacturers have been able to address a wide range of performance and convenience needs — at surprisingly affordable prices. These VCRs are easier to operate, offer better audio and video performance, and do things like control the cable box and set their own clocks. By reading this guide you have taken an important step toward learning more about what today's VCRs can offer. Sony has provided the chart of new Sony models on the back page of this special section to help you begin shopping for the VCR that's right for you.



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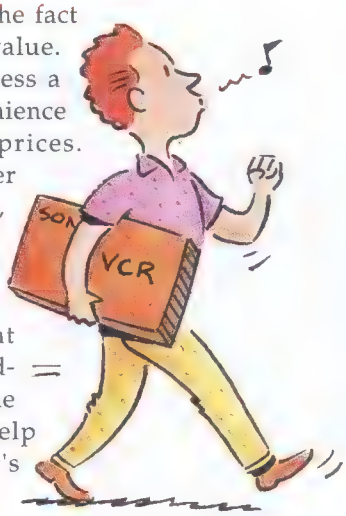
On-Screen Help displays essential information about your VCR's operation on your TV monitor.



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SONY®

VHS Videocassette Recorders

Today's VCRs are easier to use, better performing and are a great value. Use the following chart to choose the Sony VCR that's right for you.

SLV-420

SLV-620HF

SLV-720HF

SLV-770HF

SLV-920HF

SLV-R1000

Model	SLV-420	SLV-620HF	SLV-720HF	SLV-770HF	SLV-920HF	SLV-R1000
VHS HiFi Stereo & MTS Stereo Tuner		•	•	•	•	•
Shuttle Control, VCR & Remote	•	•	•	•	•	•
Cable Mouse Cable Box Control	•		•	•	•	•
VCR Plus+ System	•		•	•	•	•
Auto Head Cleaner	•	•	•	•	•	•
On Screen Menu & Help	•	•	•	•	•	•
30-sec Commercial Skip	•	•	•	•	•	•
UniCommander® Remote	•	•	•	•	•	•
8 Event/1 Month Programming w/3hr Back-up	•	•	•	•	•	•
Auto Clock Set/Audio Station ID (where available)				•	•	
Adaptive Picture Control (APC)				•	•	•
Front Panel AV Inputs				•	•	•
Multi-brand TV Remote				•	•	•
High Speed Rewind				•	•	•
Super VHS						•
Flying Erase Head™ w/AV Insert					•	•
Suggested Retail Price	$399	$499	$549	$599	$649	$1,299

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EYES-ON REPORT

SONY MDP-500 LASERDISC PLAYER

SONY'S MDP-500 AV laserdisc player offers full feature convenience combined with the superb picture and sound quality the laserdisc medium is known for.

Of course the VCR remains the staple of every home theater; and the laserdisc player isn't a replacement for it by any means. Still, the laserdisc medium is the only one that brings out the full spectrum of visual and aural detail that films, high-quality video productions and fine musical recordings contain. And this Sony unit proves the point.

This model provides up to 425 lines of horizontal resolution and a video signal-to-noise ratio of 49 dB for clear, detailed pictures. Our eyes-on tests also found that you get richer, more natural color, clear and crisper motion — and all of these come through in spades, especially on big-screen televisions.

Consider the laserdisc player a CD player that also plays videos. The MDP-500 is a combi-player, meaning it accommodates 12- and 8-inch laserdiscs, 5-inch CD Video and conventional music CDs. So you actually get more than one component in one package.

The sound quality between the audio and video discs was judged to be virtually the same to most listeners. This unit features 1-bit Digital-To-Analog conversion for low distortion on CDs and and digital audio laserdiscs. Signal-to-noise ratio is rated at 115 dB+ and frequency response is 4 Hz - 20 kHz.

The MDP-500 becomes an integral part of your home theater quickly and easily. It features two sets of audio outputs for connection to both television and high fidelity system, basic video output, as well as two specialized connections: S-video output for a cleaner, clearer signal; and Control "S" input for the integration into A/V systems using the SRC-100 A/V controller, which allows control of other components from the remote.

Viewing a movie on laserdisc in the home theater on the MDP-500 is truly a remarkable experience. In addition, with CLV discs, you can scan the discs forward or reverse to find a desired point clearly. Laserdiscs' picture quality and digital sound are great for material you buy and keep — not just rent for the night — especially music videos, concerts and classic films. In addition, random access and the ability to play discs over and over without wear makes it the perfect medium for children's movies.

Conveniences abound. For instance, this unit features auto reverse, which means that you don't have to get up after one hour and turn a 12-inch motion picture disc over when one side has come to its end. The machine automatically does it for you with a minimum of interruption. Sony also offers the convenience of Auto Resume; if your movie is interrupted by real life, turn off the player and when you return and turn the player back on, it automatically commences play where you left off. Quick Start/Quick Reverse provides faster laserdisc response. Auto Disc Protection keeps the disc flat by disengaging the spindle when you press Stop. On-screen displays let you know the status of functions, while the full-function Remote Commander puts all operations at your fingertips. You can also peruse discs via Frame/Time Search and 10-key Direct Chapter/Track Search. You also have three-way repeat for laserdiscs and two-way repeat for CDs. And Sony's Automatic Chapter Sensor/Automatic Music Sensor system skips forward or backward to LD chapters or CD tracks.

Sony's MDP-500 AV laserdisc player is great entertainment at a great value. It provides an affordable laserdisc entry with double-side play and Sony quality.

"On-screen displays let you know the status of functions, while the full-function Remote Commander puts all operations at your fingertips."

MDP-500 SPECIFICATIONS

DIGITAL AUDIO

D/A Converter: 1-bit

Oversampling Frequency: 8X

Signal-To-Noise Ratio: More Than 115 DB

Frequency Response: 4 Hz - 20 kHz (+0.3 dB)

Dynamic Range: More Than 99 dB

Wow & Flutter: Below measurable limits (+0.001% W. Peak)

VIDEO

Horizontal Resolution: Up to 425 lines

Signal-To-Noise Ratio: More Than 49 dB

INPUTS AND OUTPUTS

Control S Input: Minijack

S-Video Output: One

Video Output: 1.O V p-p, 75 ohms, unbalanced

Analog Stereo Audio Outputs: 200 mV (1 kHz, 40% modulation); two sets

GENERAL

Power Requirements: 120 VAC, 60 Hz

Power Consumption: 40 W

Dimensions (WHD): 17 x 4 5/8 x 16 1/2" (430 x 117 x 420.5 mm)

Weight: 22 lbs.

Supplied Accessories: RMT-M23A Remote Commander Remote Control with 2 AA batteries; Audio and video connecting cords; AC power cord; instruction manual

BY STEWART APPLEGATH

A Sony hybrid, a Smart Radio and a Cat's Eye

SONY'S SIDEFINDER ▸

Sony's Hi8 CCD-FX730V camcorder is a hybrid that adds the versatility of a 3-inch color LCD screen to its traditional viewfinder apparatus. The LCD swings out from the left side of the camera and can be tilted to different angles. It has a built-in speaker which allows you to listen on playback to footage you've just shot. When it's too bright outdoors, you can use the traditional viewfinder setup. The camcorder also features a 12x variable-speed zoom and four-mode auto exposure. (For more info, circle 110 on the Reader Service Card)

◂ ASG JUKEBOX

ASG Technologies' Video JukeBox ($49) is an electronic cartridge server for Sega Genesis and Sega CD users. Players can store up to six game cartridges in a unit shaped like a stereo component. Its networking software allows VJs to be attached to each other, allowing gamers to store up to 36 cartridges, or six VJs. (For additional info, circle 105 on the Reader Service Card)

▾ DELECTABLE SELECTABLE

The Video Series Home Theater Speaker System ($1,649) is the first line of speakers KLH has designed specifically for home theaters and media rooms. With a magnetically shielded center speaker, it plays back hi-fi music, movies, videogames and TV sound tracks produced in Dolby Surround and Dolby Pro-Logic. Thanks to two selectable crossover frequencies, separate volume and phase controls, and inputs for speaker and line-level signals, the system's powered subwoofer can be used comfortably for movies or music. (For additional info, circle 108 on the Reader Service Card)

HEAD TURNER ▸

Sharp's Auto Pan Head accessory ($449) may improve your game. Once you attach a camcorder, the head will revolve automatically to face any sounds and set the camcorder to record. Sharp says it's good for both golf swings and social events. The Auto Pan Head comes with a remote control. (For additional info, circle 100 on the Reader Service Card)

◂ SMART SYSTEM

Denon's AVR-2500 AV Surround Receiver ($1,000) is its first to include RDS SmartRadio digital data capability, and employ an icon-based onscreen display. SmartRadio automatically finds another station with the same programming when the station originally tuned becomes too weak for good reception. A multisource capability lets a second room enjoy a different audio or video source than that in the viewing room. (For additional info, circle 109 on the Reader Service Card)

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AND THE BAND PLAYED ON	1240100
ANOTHER STAKEOUT	1238203
ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK (DIRECTOR'S CUT)	1249507
FATAL INSTINCT	1213008
FRANCIS IN THE NAVY	1249705
THE THING CALLED LOVE	1190800
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NEW PRODUCTS

◄THX DELUXE

Do you have $21,250 to spare? Apogee Sound's Motion Picture Theater System One is a loudspeaker monitoring speaker system for mixing and evaluating the sound accompanying films and videos. It was designed by Lucasfilm THX for use in the mixdown of THX soundtracks. It has switchable features that deliver appropriate sound when installed behind picture screens or elsewhere and one that switches between film industry or small room settings. (For additional info, circle 107 on the Reader Service Card)

WOODSTOCK REVISITED ▼

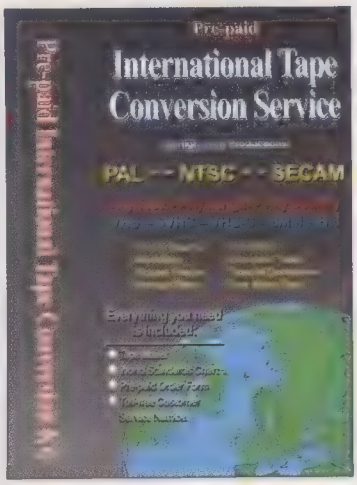
Woodstock II is not a movie sequel, but CWD's new Entertainment Center. It takes but four feet of space and gives your home theater system a custom hideaway. It's 46 inches wide by 57 inches high and holds a 35-inch TV. Closing doors and adjustable shelves make it both unobtrusive and suitable for different component systems—the vertical divider moves to allow a center-channel speaker to be positioned directly below the TV. Woodstock II is available in various wood finishes, with solid or sound-permeable, fabric-grille cabinet doors. The price is $1,100. (For additional info, circle 101 on the Reader Service Card)

TRANSMISSION TARGET ▼

BullsEye ($140) is Recoton's new indoor/outdoor antenna system. The 24-inch TV/FM dish can be mounted anywhere—on the floor or ceiling, outdoors, even in closets. The BullsEye is intended to improve the reception of broadcasts from stations up to 150 miles away. You can also mount the BullsEye on RVs or boats. (For additional info, circle 106 on the Reader Service Card)

FOREIGN CONVERSION ►

Relatives in far-flung places will appreciate High-Tech Productions' Pre-paid International Tape Conversion Service ($40), which converts tapes from one format to another. Using much the same idea as Kodak's pre-paid film mailers, High-Tech will change NTSC tapes, running up to 8 hours from or to PAL or SECAM formats. You fill out an enclosed form, drop the tape in the VHS-sized mailer and take it to the post office. High-Tech says it will be mailed back within 24 hours. (For additional info, circle 104 on the Reader Service Card)



CAT'S EYE RECORDER ▼

Sharp's VL-L490U Slimcam ($850) weighs in at just under four pounds. It offers a 12x variable speed power zoom and a new feature Sharp calls Cat's Eye recording which enables the camera to see in only 1 lux conditions. The VHS VL-L490U also features full-range autofocus, a switchable high-speed shutter, an intelligent auto iris, audio/video fade in/out, and a digital locking auto white balance. (For additional info, circle 102 on the Reader Service Card)

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A unique Pro-Logic decoder & a video capture card

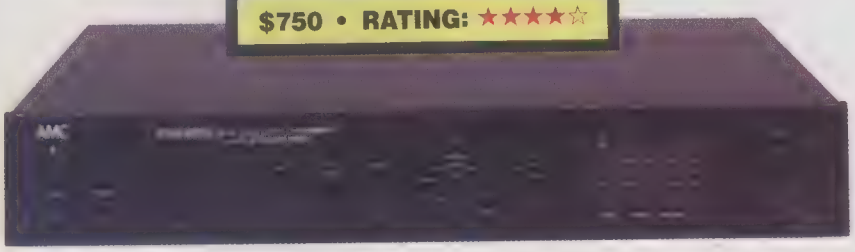
AMC AV81HT Surround Sound Processor

As Corey Greenberg wrote in last month's "Home Theater" column, setting up a home theater sound system by ear usually leaves it several decibels out of whack. AMC, a manufacturer of reasonably priced high-end audio gear, has taken this lesson to heart with the AV81HT, the first Pro-Logic decoder/preamp with an integral sound-pressure level meter.

Just plug the microphone AMC includes with the AV81HT into the front panel, activate the test tone and watch the meter. An orange LED indicates when the level is right; green ones tell you you're too low or too high. The one snag is the channel level controls, which are on the back instead of on the remote control, making adjustment less convenient—you have to keep looking around to the front, or get a friend to help.

The AV81HT costs $750; a THX-approved version will soon be available for a few hundred more. The only difference is that the THX version includes the signal-processing tchotchkes specified by Lucasfilm. I think this is smart. Nowadays, almost all good decoders are THX-certified, so many people pay for THX whether they want it or not. Those who'd rather spend their bucks on laserdiscs and CDs than on extra signal processing will rejoice.

$750 • RATING: ★★★★☆



The front panel has a real switches'n'knobs feel—no fancy displays, unnecessary bells and whistles or music surround modes, just outstanding build quality for a $750 processor. It makes a great system control center, with four video/audio inputs (two with recording loops), four audio inputs (two with recording loops), a headphone jack and three rear AC outlets. However, the remote can't control other components, and there are no S-video jacks. The only ergonomic glitch I found—and it's a big one—is that you can't select the input or the surround mode from the front panel, only from the remote.

When I compared the AV81HT with an Adcom GTP-600 and a Fosgate Model Four (both $1,000), it made a very respectable showing. The Model Four sounds extremely smooth, but is lacking in user-friendliness and appearance. The feature-laden GTP-600 doesn't sound quite as fabulous, but strikes (for me) a more practical balance of good sound and great ergonomics. The AV81HT's sound places it in the same league as the GTP-600; the difference I noted was that the AV81HT sounds very slightly thinner. It also seemed to me that the AV81HT's steering sounded a little more realistic, although since both use the same Analog Devices Pro-Logic chip, I can't see how they could be different. Still, stranger things have happened in audio....

This product is ideal for those seeking to put together something better than a typical A/V receiver-based system at a comparable cost. Pair it up with a good multichannel amp, and you'll have a rockin' system you *know* will be calibrated correctly.

—Brent Butterworth

Intel Smart Video Recorder

Intel, the company that makes the processors that probably make your PC run, has entered the multimedia market with a bang—a video capture card called the Smart Video Recorder. At $499, it seems a bit expensive compared with Creative Labs' $399 VideoSpigot or Sigma Designs' $299 WinMovie. However, Intel's board comes with video compression hardware in addition to compression software. Such hardware is usually found only on boards costing a great deal more. Since hardware compression reduces both the size of the file and the strain on your computer's throughput, there are fewer dropped frames and image quality improves.

As impressive as the Smart Video Recorder is, it is not designed for producing conventional NTSC video. With a capture speed limited to 15 frames per second at 320 by 240 pixels, and no NTSC output, the board is really for multimedia purposes, like making those movie clips you see on CD-ROMs or spicing up business presentations on your computer. But Intel will soon market a new version, the $570 Smart Video Recorder Pro, that captures at double the speed—30 frames per second. It is possible to create watchable videos using the Smart Video Recorder, an NTSC output board and an editing program like Adobe *Premiere*, but the quality will be below that of VHS. You can also use it to capture full-color still frames from video at up to 640 by 480 pixels, which is good enough for a "video snapshot" from a color printer.

continued on page 47

$499 • RATING: ★★★★★

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WAYNE AND
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Circle 6 on Reader Service Card.

BY TIMOTHY LIEBE

The difficulties of capturing art on video.

As a videographer, I've often found myself working in unusual situations for a variety of people. I've done no-budget horror features for first-time producers, videos for eccentric performance artists, comedy shows, and documentaries about controversial art installations. Through a good deal of this, I've worked with fellow videographers. But I've forged my most unusual working relationship with an artist, Thomas Gansevoort.

Since the mid-'80s, Thomas and I have worked on a variety of video projects together, and we've both discovered a great deal about what it takes to integrate our very specific—and very different—styles to get the job done. How we've managed to achieve this, and remain good friends despite frequent differences of opinion, is what this month's column is about.

I first met Thomas over a decade ago, when we were both members of a now-defunct radio drama company. There's a certain irony in the fact that two extremely visual people—Thomas is an abstract artist, while I'm a dyed-in-the-wool videohead—should find themselves doing radio. This might be part of the reason we became friends—even though Thomas feels Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* and *Orpheus* are among the greatest films ever made, and my personal tastes run more to *The Terminator* and *The Road Warrior*.

Although we have distinctly different *modus operandi*, I've often found Thomas' input invaluable. Our first experience together was on a low-budget horror film called *The Transgression*. Thomas impressed me with his set-designing skills, helping to put together mad scientists' laboratories and government offices in a basement using nothing but a few bags of outdated electronic parts and some borrowed furniture.

In the late '80s, I approached some friends about committing their 30-minute comedy show, *That's Elementary*, to video. Thomas' set design required the creation of several different Hollywood genres on a budget of less than $5,000. He worked miracles, recreating an Art Deco ballroom in a loft apartment with the aid of $40 worth of Mylar tape, black construction paper and glittery fabric.

Video Meets Art: At top, an inexpensive background gives *That's Elementary* an old Holloywood look. At bottom, a scene from a dance video.

We have worked on several projects since, including a half-hour program for the video arts organization Cast Iron TV, a video based on an Adam Kurtzman papier machee sculpture, and dance and movement tapes based on Thomas' choreography. But we've had a few clashes over style.

There's been the difficulty of integrating my way of working, which can be summed up as the videographer's equivalent of the actor's saw, "Learn your lines and don't bump into the furniture," with Thomas' precise vision. On one occasion, what was intended as a simple hour-or-two shoot ended up taking all night because Thomas wasn't satisfied with the footage we had gotten. What we ultimately ended up with was much better, but I wasn't in the mood to see that at the time.

When we started working together, we discovered a problem common among people from different professions—communicating ideas so both parties understand them. Once, Thomas asked me for a sort of "panning" shot that didn't sound like it could be done from where the camera was. After five minutes of heated discussion, we hit on a sequence we'd both seen that had what he wanted—the opening shot from Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*. This is a great way for people from different disciplines working in video to communicate—there's almost always a common point of reference in a familiar old movie.

One way for us to smooth over communication barriers has been to share our skills. I've been teaching Thomas how to use a camcorder and letting him do some shooting. This way, he understands what I'm doing, so that if he has something he can't explain but can visualize, he can do it himself.

I've also gotten him into the habit of taking a VHS copy of the day's footage home and doing "paper cuts"—writing down where he wants the edits to happen by using the timer numbers on his VCR. (If you ever get pressed into editing a friend's videos, get him or her to do this—it'll save you hours.) With less success, he's been instructing me in the art of model building and "forced perspective." I've got the theory, but I'm not as dexterous as he is, nor as patient.

There's also the conflict in our views about art. Mine runs more to Norman Rockwell than to Mondrian—or so I tell him in my puckish moments. I once got a rise out him as we were shooting outside New York's Guggenheim Museum by looking up at the spiral structure and asking, in my most innocent voice, if the architect wasn't making an editorial comment about modern art by designing a building that looked like a toilet bowl. Thomas just shook his head and sighed.

Overall though, Thomas has learned about how he can use video effectively and economically to express his artistic vision, and I've become more discerning about the aesthetics of video. I've also learned that not all modern art is pretentious garbage—I found I kind of like Jackson Pollack and Salvador Dali. Even Thomas has broadened his horizons—he recently admitted that he really enjoyed watching *The Road Warrior*. ■

Advertising Supplement

Home Theater Across America

Sponsored by VIDEO Magazine & Electronic Industries Association/Consumer Electronics Group

Four Great Home Theaters

Winners of The National Home Theater Award Search

Welcome to the First National Home Theater Award Search

HUNDREDS of home theaters have been reviewed and evaluated by the editorial staffs of *Video Magazine* and the Electronic Industries Association's Consumer Electronics Group (EIA) to select those examples that best demonstrate the range of today's home theater possibilities. All contestants were judged on the originality and attractiveness of their systems' decor and equipment, and written descriptions about what makes their system so special. The EIA selected four winners — one for each of the broad price categories.

To emphasize how affordable home theater can be, our "search" has concentrated on four "start from scratch" systems in four price categories: Up to $1,500, $1,500-$3,000, $3,000-$5,000 and Over $5,000.

The Wiley's "Movies in the Attic" home theater honorable mention.

Burns' "Movie Palace" honorable mentio

"Home theater has taken America by storm," says Gary Shapiro, group vice president of the EIA. "Consumers are recognizing that a home theater is affordable and relatively easy to assemble. There is no doubt that the home theater will be the primary household interface for tomorrow's information superhighway."

Sales of large-screen TVs are an indicator of how fast the home theater phenomenon is growing. According to EIA statistics, sales of color TVs measuring 30-inches and above jumped 51 percent over the preceding year (1993), while projection TV sales grew 6 percent during the same period.

"Home theater is also revolutionizing the way we watch a wide array of programming," Shapiro adds. "With a large-screen television and surround sound effects, you feel like you're riding with Clint Eastwood in *Unforgiven* or

watching the basketball or hockey playoffs from a front-row seat. Home theater has the unique ability to make you feel like you're in the center of the action."

What is a home theater?

For the purposes of this contest, a home theater system includes a large-screen television (25 inches or larger), Hi-Fi stereo VCR, laserdisc player, amplifier with surround sound, and four or more speakers. In reality, home theater is really much more than just an assemblage of equipment.

Home theater is truly the entertainment trend of the '90's. It is a reflection of contemporary life: people are spending more time at home and are expecting more services to be provided with a minimum of hassle. The modern catalog is to shopping what home theater is to public entertainment: consumer conveniences whose time has come.

One thing is certain: the sights and sounds of the neighborhood movie theater can now be re-created in your home, at surprisingly affordable prices.

How affordable is home theater?

Many of the home theater systems entered in our contest cost under $1,500 to assemble, making use of a range of components that the entrants already owned. Then again, home theater systems can cost upwards of $250,000 — complete with room environments, acoustical treatments, motorized screens, sophisticated lighting and the finest interior decors.

How do I build my home theater?

The four award-winning systems that follow are excellent examples to consider. Your choice ultimately depends on your budget and your creativity. You can take a single brand approach and utilize an existing cabinet. You can take the middle ground by making use of your current collection of components and putting together a do-it-yourself theater shelving system. If you don't want to "do it yourself" you can find a range of system installation specialists listed in your local Yellow Pages. A lot depends on your taste and style. But as these contest winners reflect, a savvy shopper can build the home theater of his or her dreams without breaking the bank.

Creative Solutions to Technical Problems

These honorable mentions offered some unique solutions to problems you may encounter when building your own home theater.

Build Your Own Movie Palace

Consider cost-effective interior styling. Greg Burns of Bayport, MN, was able to transform his living room into a "movie palace" by acquiring most of the decor for his home theater at antique stores and salvage yards. Complete with pillars, auto dimming lights, Dolby Pro-Logic surround sound and a 10-foot video picture, Burns has created a vintage viewing interior design which compliments the high tech audio/video of his preferred laserdisc format. The trick to his special home theater system? "Buying a used video projector saved thousands and adding a glass bead screen produced the brightness levels of new projectors."

Movies in the Attic

What do you do when space limits your home theater aspirations? In what used to be an abandoned old attic in their Kirkland, WA home, Pat Wiley and his family now have great bonding experiences around the big-screen TV. The attic has a pyramid-like ceiling which made it a little difficult to make everything fit visually as well as acoustically. But with the help of Heston Technical Services, a local installer, it all came together neatly and easy to use. The end result is that Wiley and his wife achieved their original goal: "...to add a feature to our house that would make the kids want to spend more time at home."

Hide and Seek Home Theater

Bob Easton's home theater couldn't compete with the scenery surrounding his hometown of West Linn, OR. This room with a view overlooks majestic Mt. Hood and a four-acre forested community park. It's not the type of view you want to obscure — even with a great home theater. How did he integrate high tech into these natural surroundings? Everything is hidden. When it is time to sit around and watch a movie, a single button is pushed, the motorized blackout curtains appear, the 100-inch screen comes down, the projector comes out of hiding from the custom-built coffee table, and the lights fade.

Bob Easton's "Hide and Seek Home Theater."

Over $5,000 Winner
of The National Home Theater Award Search

Center of Attention

Name: Charles Clark, ASID & Suzanne Hudson, The Design Center, Douglasville, GA.

Price Category: Over $5,000

Comments: The homeowner remarked: "This home theater system is unique because it is an integral part of our living environment — not an added feature tacked onto an existing structure. Utilizing a 100-inch screen, VCR, laserdisc, draperies and light manipulation, we use the theater as a constant source of entertainment for all the individual wants of the household. On a given evening, one is likely to find the whole family enjoying a classic film, a church group watching a video, or some friends enjoying a sports event among unparalleled surroundings."

Components: Harman Model 8 Video projector, Harman ALD-1 Line doubler, Stewart 100-inch film screen, Yamaha DSP-A2070 audio/video processor, (4) Parasound SCA-1200 power amplifiers, Mitsubishi HS-U69 SVHS Hi-Fi VCR, Pioneer CLD-D702 laserdisc player, Panamax Max 1000 AC line conditioner, Miller & Kreiser LPB-4 high-pass filter, Miller & Kreiser MX-100 subwoofers, Makita drapery motors and Macro Corporation lighting/dimming panel.

When Old Meets New

Name: Donald R. Thompson, Glenford, NY

Price Category: $3,000-$5,000

Comments: "Our home theater blends unobtrusively with a circa 1826 post & beam house, original fireplace, an operating pipe organ (circa 1800), spinning wheel, etc. During entertaining when theater use is inappropriate, the 46-inch screen disappears behind "dutch doors." During theater mode, the top half of the dutch door disappears into an overhead pocket; we then often have a fire in the fireplace, movie on the screen, hammock in place (or just the old couch and lounger). We lack cable (too rural) so we are looking to RCA's DSS 18-inch dish to improve TV quality and variety and a laserdisc player for quality movies. The sound is already great."

Components: Hitachi rear projection television, Pioneer VSX 502 A/V receiver with surround sound, Panasonic Hi-Fi stereo VCR, Yamaha front speakers, Advent center speakers, Yamaha rear speakers and subwoofer.

Home Sweet Home

Name: Tito M. Famacion, Daly City, CA

Price Category: $1,500-$3,000

Comments: "Once, our home atmosphere was boring; video and audio entertainments could not be appreciated. Not until we were able to set up a home theater system from scratch did we start to enjoy wholesome viewing and listening pleasure. What makes it so special is that the sounds and pictures generated from the system are just superb and look so real and alive that you feel the theater-like experience right in the living room. My family has been closer than ever as we are together most of the time enjoying the movies and music from our home theater system."

Components: Toshiba CF2668v 26-inch television, Pioneer CLD V820 laserdisc player, Sharp VC H75U Hi-Fi VCR, Bose front speakers, and DCM center channel speakers, Pioneer CX500K rear speaker, Carrera subwoofer and Sony STR 990 A/V receiver.

Small Room, Big Sound

Name: Brad Tompkins, House Springs, MO

Price Category: Up to $1,500

Comments: "My roommate and I live in a small home near St. Louis. Because my bedroom is more or less my 'living room,' I was looking for a way to enjoy movies, in surround sound, in a small space. I wanted clean, clear sound, excellent picture quality, and of course, a small compact (as possible) system. My result? A system that fits in the corner of my room, and has all the vital ingredients of an impressive, larger home theater."

Components: Zenith television, Pioneer CLD-5250 laserdisc player, Pioneer V5X-402 A/V receiver with surround sound, RCA Hi-Fi VCR, Infinity SL10 front speakers and JBL rear speakers.

Home Theater Dream Contest Winners

In 40-50 words, you had to tell us how you and your family would benefit from a home theater system. Everyone had their different needs and first place winner John Gengl expressed his quite cleverly: "I'd invite the boss over to watch the big game. We'd become friends, he'd give me a raise. I'd add onto my house, have a party with the CEO attending. He'd know my name and make me president of the company...until then, I'll just watch my B&W 13-inch TV."

Congratulations to all the winners. Here are the names of the 100 runners up.

1. Diana Hillard
2. Pam Weiner
3. Anthony Mohammed
4. Raymond Valliere
5. Herbert Techau
6. Mr. Laverne Buchanan
7. Jerilynn Morra
8. Debra Dean
9. Christine Cardi
10. Maureen Reuter
11. L. Rosen
12. Mary Arnold
13. Debbie Robinson
14. Dougles J. Thompson
15. Alvin S. Finegold
17. Uruth Israel
18. Thomas F. Seally II
19. Kathleen Poole
20. Ruth Ann Fahrlander
21. Michael LaPorte
22. L.G. Spears
23. Sandra Gilmore
24. Bobby Savanh
25. Bob Estes
26. Mike Competillo
27. Mark Randolph
28. John E. Leal
29. Melinda Willis
30. Bruce Hall
31. D.S. Blizzard
32. Kathy Vining DeLorie
33. Sam Hudson
34. Kelly Hoffman
35. Ingelise Caroe
36. David Harrelson
37. Melissa Ennis
38. Ninette J. Ghino
39. Lilly Rogers Hinton
40. Robert Turco
41. Mildred D. Harder
42. William Hesson
43. David Herrick
44. Tom Durakis
45. Rob Tucker
46. Cyril & Louise Brennen
47. Stephanie Vitacco
48. Mr. Alfred Beaty
49. Richard Fassulal
50. Catherine M. Schilling
51. Paula King
52. Bill Frost
53. Charlotte Lowe
54. Lisa Failoni
55. Martin Kast
56. Vijay S. Darekar
57. Kay Adams
58. Darrell Crissman
59. Ludd F. Schmidt
60. Philip Jnin
61. Donald L. Baker
62. Joe H. Williams
63. Lois M. Lungaro
64. Jerry R. Esters
65. Diane Doherty
66. Joe Abrams
67. Paul D. Ryerson
68. Gary Manley
69. Claudene H. McCully
70. Tina Coffey
71. Jesi Hanna
72. Anthony V. Monaco
73. Carol Dabundo
74. David Murphy
75. David Mechals
76. S.K. Muszynski
77. Jane Foster
78. Rubina Jilani
79. Fernando De LaTorre
80. Eric Brown
81. Judy Johnson
82. Ardis Bartle
83. Sandra Smith
84. Donald A. Bailey
85. Audrey Lyons
86. Guillermo Cuesta
87. James F. Schwartz
88. Julie Bisgaard
89. Mack Weems
90. Mary Lou Moe
91. Eric P. Fost
92. Dr. Eduardo J. Perez Garcia
93. Scott W. Webb
94. Nguyen Huynh
95. Tina Courtney
96. Todd Schannuth
97. John Baloun
98. E. M. Bishop
99. Richard Olsen
100. Patrick Muldowney

RODERICK WOODCOCK

Dual-size decks, dub speeds and shooting an eclipse

Q I have a VHS-C camcorder. A year or so ago, before I bought it, I remember seeing a VCR that looked like it used both VHS-C as well as standard-size VHS cassettes. My dealer says these machines aren't available anymore. Why not? It seems like they would be popular with people like me, who need to play both types of VHS cassette.

George Kesselman,
Palm Springs, California

A Panasonic and JVC offered a number of VCRs a few years ago that could play both VHS-C and VHS cassettes. Unfortunately, these so-called full-size/compact machines used a somewhat complicated cassette loading mechanism that proved too expensive to justify their continued manufacture, especially since sales were disappointing. A few very expensive industrial machines still offer this dual-cassette capability, since both S-VHS and S-VHS-C have found success in industrial and professional markets as electronic news gathering formats that are more cost-effective than Betacam or M-II.

Q I would like to assure R.A. Haas ("Q&A," June) that it is possible to make high-quality dubs to standard VHS. Just use another Mitsubishi S-VHS VCR! Using a Mitsubishi U-71, I recorded a documentary off-air in S-VHS EP mode. When I needed to make a dub for a friend, I did so at the VHS SP speed. The copy, in standard VHS, was as good as any off-air VHS tape, and better than any store-bought movie tape. I now use S-VHS EP for my entire off-air video library. I can't tolerate VHS EP even for casual timeshifting, but S-VHS EP is far better. I've saved a lot of storage space as well. It's a shame some chains have completely given up on S-VHS.

Louis A. Carliner,
Rockville, Maryland

A While I agree that S-VHS EP can deliver outstanding results—I often use it myself to timeshift an entire evening of programs—I must point out the pitfalls involved in archiving programs at this speed. As long as you use the same machine for recording and playing your EP collection, you're not likely to notice some of the tracking problems that are far too common with slow-speed tapes. Try playing some of these tapes on another VCR (regardless of brand) or a few years from now and you'll see what I mean.

EP was never intended for long-term program storage. That's the domain of SP. That's why it's called the "standard speed." A standard is something people can rely on to be consistent, especially from one product to another. Even JVC, the inventor of VHS, acknowledges that SP is superior, and doesn't make any claims for the reliable interchange of tapes at any speed except SP.

The lure of condensing three or four bulky VHS tapes into one S-VHS tape is certainly attractive when storage space is limited, but it's not even economically sensible. The best discount price for an ST-120 tape is about $7, while plain T-120 (name brands to boot) regularly dip to $2 or less. EP tapes are also more prone to dropouts, and with S-VHS the video noise also increases at the slower speed. For my money, something worth keeping is still worth keeping on VHS SP. Or better still, at S-VHS SP.

Q I have a Minolta camcorder with a time-lapse feature and I'd like to use it to record an upcoming solar eclipse. As far as I know, this camcorder has a single CCD chip and a manual iris control. Will prolonged exposure to direct sunlight damage it, and what kind of filters will help me get the best possible image?

Russ Rosener,
St. Louis, Missouri

A Aiming an unprotected CCD camcorder directly at the sun for even a short time can damage the chip as well as the viewfinder housing, which will funnel the intense image and create a hot spot. While CCDs are burn-resistant compared to earlier tube-type pickups, which often left streaks and "comet tails" behind brightly lit objects like candles, they aren't invulnerable. If you pan the camcorder briefly over a highly reflective surface you won't get these artifacts. But if you focus the camcorder on a very bright object for too long you'll definitely risk some damage.

The safe way to photograph the sun with a camcorder is with heavy filtration, using dark neutral density filters. ■

BANG!
BOOM!
whisper whisper

whisper whisper
BOOM!
BANG!

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BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

How a new organization of video technicians plans to fix your TV's color

Joe Kane says your TV picture is all wrong. And he's right.

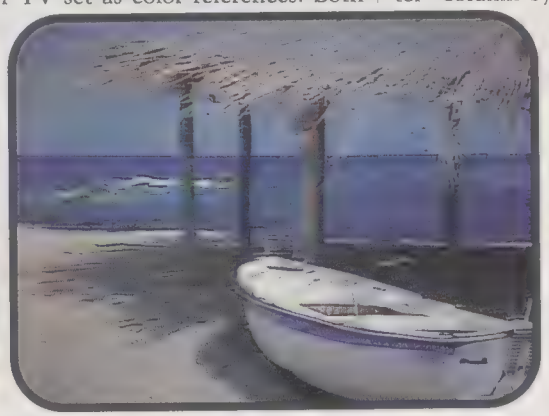
What's wrong with that 32-inch Sony you just spent $1,500 on, you say? According to Kane, its color is probably *way* off. That's because its color temperature—which indicates the bias of a set toward a reddish, bluish or greenish shade—doesn't conform to the standard set when our color television system was created 40 years ago. Kane has devoted much of his career to teaching the industry how to get the best color from video monitors. And now he's bringing his crusade into consumer's homes.

Color temperature is measured in degrees Kelvin. If we say a TV has a color temperature of 8,000 degrees Kelvin, that means its whites have the same shade as a piece of pure carbon heated to that temperature.

Most of today's sets have a color temperature of 9,000 degrees Kelvin or higher. But the standard for the NTSC (National Television Standards Committee) system used in the U.S. is 6,500 degrees Kelvin. The 6,500-degree color temperature is still used for professional monitors, but has long since fallen out of favor for consumer TVs. The result is that the pictures most of us watch have a bluish cast.

Unless your TV's color temperature is very high—say, over 10,000 Kelvin—you probably haven't *noticed* a bluish cast in your TV picture. That's because your eyes adjust to different color temperatures. You still see fleshtones as fleshtones, no matter if they're lit with a 2,500-Kelvin incandescent lamp or 10,000-Kelvin sunlight.

But once you see a monitor calibrated to 6,500 Kelvin next to a typical TV set, you realize what you've been missing in color accuracy. I notice the difference mainly in fleshtones (which look nearly perfect at 6,500) and black-and-white movies, which take on a just-right hue that reminds me of the way they look in the movie theater. At *Video Magazine*, we use a Sony professional monitor and a calibrated ProScan consumer TV set as color references. Both blow away the factory-calibrated consumer sets we test when it comes to color rendition.



Color Commentary: Imaging Science Foundation cofounder Joe Kane says the TV on the left is too blue at 9,700 Kelvin, but the other set is just right at 6,500 Kelvin.

Kane was perhaps the first to bring the color temperature issue to the attention of videophiles through his writing, his test and calibration laserdisc *A Video Standard*, and his frequent appearances and demonstrations at trade shows. Now that he has brought the issue to the fore, Kane and his associate Joel Silver have created a solution: the Imaging Science Foundation.

Through the Imaging Science Foundation, Kane is training custom installers and other technicians to properly calibrate video monitors. He recently began traveling around the country giving seminars that explain his concepts and techniques, and provide hands-on experience in monitor calibration. It's not an especially difficult process, but don't try to do it yourself—it requires knowledge, patience and a Philips color analyzer that costs about $5,000.

To find a qualified calibration technician in your area, just call the ISF at 407-997-9073. The service costs about $200 per monitor, which is a bargain when you consider that any videophile would gladly pay a much higher premium to get a top-notch set instead of a price-leader cheapie.

An ISF-trained technician will also be able to calibrate the black level (brightness), white level (contrast) and sharpness of your set to ensure maximum picture accuracy and resolution. As reported in our June "Home Theater" column by Kevin Miller (who, like myself, has been trained by Kane), the factory settings for these parameters are usually far from optimum.

The results of proper calibration may vary somewhat depending on your set. A few TV sets are designed for easy 6,500-Kelvin calibration. For example, ProScan direct-view sets offer screwdriver gain (maximum level) and bias (minimum level) of red, green and blue; Toshiba and Mitsubishi sets have service menus that allow easy adjustment of these parameters.

No matter what set you have, though, the ISF should be able to get the best possible picture from it. The ISF provides its technicians with the menu commands necessary to adjust the color temperature of most TVs, and collects field reports from all its technicians on the characteristics of different models of TV sets so it can offer advice as to the best procedure with a certain set. (Customers also get a copy of the field report when they have their set calibrated.)

There's one problem with 6,500-Kelvin calibration that you need to consider. The problem—and the reason manufacturers have gone to higher temperatures—is that 6,500-Kelvin pictures are fairly dim. In a dimly lit broadcast control room, that's no problem. But in a brightly lit living room, a 6,500-Kelvin picture is tough to watch. Videophiles will be happy to make the rearrangements in room lighting needed to take advantage of proper calibration, but the

continued on page 84

LES MORSILLO

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VIDEO ADVERTISER Q&A

Carl Cohen, Director of New Products for Sima, talks about the importance of Control L.

Q What exactly is Control L and what does it involve?

A In a simple way, it's a Sony-developed system that takes the tape position signal from the camcorder and lets other video equipment, such as an editor, use it to make editing much easier to do.To use Control L, you must start with a Control L (LANC) camcorder from Sony or a Sony derivative. This makes up a good 20 to 25 percent of the camcorders on the market. Look for the special Control L output jack on the camcorder's side. Some companies, such as Sima, offer special editors with Control L connectors that go into this output jack and read the Control L tape position system. This signal allows the consumer to go through their footage, selecting IN and OUT edit points that are "memorized" by the editor; in essence automating the entire process.

Q What other products does it work with?

A Sony has new VCRs with Control L and, along with other manufacturers, including Sima, has come out with editors that use the feature. The Sima FX-L is our latest editor. It connects to a Sony Control L camcorder and any recording VCR to automate the editing. You not only preset your IN and OUT points, the FX-L automatically does color wipes and color fades.

Q What's coming up in Control L technology?

A You will be able to use Control L with computers. We're coming out with a product called PC Video Edit. Your computer will control the camcorder through Control L and the recording VCR with an infra-red signal. You will be able to make an edit decision list, manipulate the sequence, save it for later use, and then automatically make an edited tape.

COLLECTOR'S CLEARINGHOUSE

Searching for Mr. D, Dr. K and Linus

I am working on an extensive, photo-packed project for the "lost" 1950s TV series *Richard Diamond, Private Detective* (syndicated as *Call Mr. D*) which starred the late David Janssen, who later played in *The Fugitive*. I am looking for four episodes – any generation or format. The episodes I need are: *The Homicide Habit, Secret Cargo* (unaired), *Marineland Mystery* and *Echo of Laughter*. This series doesn't use onscreen titles to identify episodes, so if anyone has any episodes, please contact me. Costs reimbursed.

Jon Strauss
9372 Tidewater Circle
Huntington Beach, CA 92646

I'm a big fan of the 1960s Saturday morning television program *Linus the Lionhearted*. I am looking for any or all episodes of this forgotten children's show. I'll be glad to pay for any expenses. VHS please.

Michael Britt
Box 271
Zebulon, GA 30295

I have been searching through TV guides ever since I bought my first VCR hoping to find reruns of my favorite medical show, *Dr. Kildare*, starring Raymond Massey and Richard Chamberlain. The episode "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright" about a surfer with epilepsy, played by Yvette Minieux, would be most appreciated. I will gladly reimburse expenses for VHS copies of any and all episodes.

Thomas Crown
Box 1092
Sun City, AZ 85372-1092

I am looking for a tape in VHS titled *Dead Dreams of the Monochrome Man*. The program aired on TVOntario, March 26, 1993 on Jay Scott's *International Film Festival*. I would be very happy to reimburse any expenses.

Usein M. Alieff
4302 Sheridan Drive
Royal Oak, MI 48073-6232

I am an avid fan of the Cars. I'm trying to locate *The Cars Live*,, which came out in 1984 or '85 on laserdisc. I understand Vestron no longer distributes it. I will happily pay for the copy.

Noel Pena
822 E. Madison
Harlington, TX 78550

There are three TV shows I really love – *As The World Turns, Guiding Light*, and hockey games. I would like to hear from people who have the following VHS tapes they can spare: the July 1985 episode of *Guiding Light* called "The opening of the Blue Orchid," the AIDS Benefit Ball episodes of *As The World Turns* (1990), and the December 30, 1993 show with a cast montage during the closing credits. I would also appreciate copies of any hockey games from this past season. I will be their pen-pal for life.

Jim Bittner
2351 Brownsville Road
Library, PA 15129

Is Frankenstein Missing?

I am interested in obtaining the following monster movies, domestic versions only, on VHS or laserdisc: *Yog Monster from Space, Frankenstein Conquers the World* and *Destroy all Monsters*. The titles are not commercially available. I will generously reimburse expenses.

Brian Cleary
6 Englewood Road
Peabody, MA 01960

I am looking for good quality copies of a series, possibly on ABC, which aired on Saturday afternoons. It's called *Wizard and Warriors*. One of the stars was Julia Duffy as a princess. I'll reimburse expenses for a VHS copy.

Norman Myszynski
8450 Christine
Warren, MI 48093

Send requests to Collector's Clearinghouse, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001. We do not locate tapes; this is a reader-to-reader service.

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VIDEO TESTS

GOLDSTAR VHS/8mm VCR

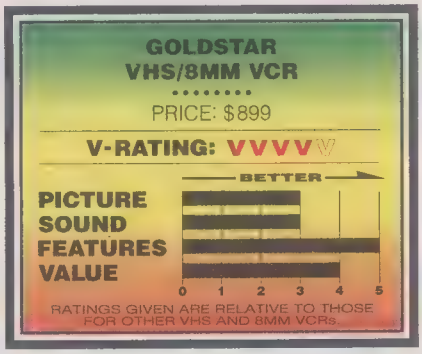
TEST 752

By Timothy Liebe

Camcorder neophytes have long bemoaned the hassles of 8mm. Most people have to connect their 8mm camcorders to a TV to play back tapes, and have to dub their tapes to VHS if they want to share them with friends. Apparently, someone at GoldStar noticed these problems, because the company's new GVR-DD1—the first VHS/8mm VCR available in the U.S.—solves all of them.

Similar in some ways to the GoVideo series of dual-deck VCRs, the "VH8" GVR-DD1 comes with an 8mm player on the left-hand side of the unit, and a VHS recorder/player on the right. This innovative deck also offers valuable editing features that make it a simple but capable home postproduction tool.

Multiburst pattern showing fair Hi8 (left) and excellent VHS (right) frequency response of GVR-DD1.



The VHS recorder has flying erase heads for clean cuts, audio/video dub and a simple titler. Video assemble or insert editing is possible either from the 8mm player or from another VCR. There's also a five-scene programmable assemble editor so that you can automate simple edit sequences—just enter the start and stop points for each scene, and the GVR-DD1 will assemble them for you.

Editing from 8mm to VHS with the

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Price: $899

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 18 lbs., 4 x 17 x 15-3/8 inches

Power Use: 44 watts

Jacks: front—video/mono audio input, mic input; rear—video/mono audio input/output, RF input/output

Tape Speeds: VHS SP, LP (play only), EP; 8mm/Hi8 playback SP, LP

Video Heads: VHS 4, 8mm/Hi8 2

Cue & Review Search: VHS SP 5x locking, 9x nonlocking; VHS EP 15x locking, 27x nonlocking, 8mm/Hi8 SP 9x forward, 7x reverse locking

Fast Forward/Rewind Time: 3-1/4 min. for 120-min. VHS tape, 8-1/3 min. for 120-min. 8mm tape

Edit Protocol: integral edit controller

Remote Control: IR wireless with controls for both decks

Program Start Locator/Index/Cue: VISS with auto/manual mark and erase (VHS only)

Audio: VHS linear mono, 8mm hi-fi AFM mono

Titles/Graphics: 1 page of 10, 5, 3 or 2 lines with 24, 12 or 8 characters per line, recordable during original recording or dubbing

Preset Method: auto program with manual add/erase

Cable Tuning Range: 2 to 13, 4A, A to W, W+1 to W+84, A-5 to A-1

Timer: 8 event/1 year

Clock/Timer Battery Backup: 1 min.

Key Features: VHS/8mm dual-deck design, one-touch dubbing, quasi-Hi8 playback; on VHS only—frame advance, slow motion, 2x speed play, audio dub, video dub, insert edit, flying erase head

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: Hi8 300 lines, 8mm 230 lines, VHS 230-220 lines

S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted video—Hi8 46.7, 8mm 45.7, VHS SP 47, VHS EP 45.4; weighted video—Hi8 51.7, 8mm 51.6, VHS SP 52.7, VHS EP 51.2; chroma AM—Hi8 41.4, 8mm 41.5, VHS SP 45.5, VHS EP 42; chroma PM—Hi8 36.7, 8mm 36.9, VHS SP 38.4, VHS EP 36

Audio Frequency Response (-3 dB): Hi8/8mm 50 Hz-7 kHz, VHS SP 100 Hz-11.5 kHz, VHS EP 75 Hz-4 kHz

Hi-Fi Dynamic Range: 63.4 dB

Linear Audio S/N: 42.3 dB

Audio Distortion: 8mm 0.4%, VHS 0.9%

PHOTOS: LES MORSILLO

GVR-DD1 is very clean and easy, even without using the assemble editor. You select where you want your edit to start, either on the 8mm side or the VHS side, then pause that half of the deck while you search for the start point on the other. By pushing the assemble edit/one touch copy button, the 8mm side of the GVR-DD1 goes into a five-second preroll, so that when the edit starts, there's no glitching at the edit point.

Audio and video dubs work more like standard deck-to-deck edits, requiring you to take both sides of the GVR-DD1 out of pause at the same time. They're still easier to do than they would be with two different VCRs, however, since both pause buttons are on the same remote control.

The deck's editing accuracy is pretty good. I found it occasionally erred by coming in a hair earlier than I wanted, but the accuracy was certainly acceptable for casual editing.

The 8mm side comes with

continued on page 44

SONY Hi8 CAMCORDER

TEST 753

By Stewart Applegath

With the arrival of the CCD-TR400, Sony remedies some of the weaknesses of last year's CCD-TR500, gives us some strong features and drops the price to $1,399. Auto exposure presets with some well-placed manual overrides, a 12x zoom, and an electronic stabilizer make this a very attractive camcorder. There is no color viewfinder (the current rage) but sticking with a black-and-white viewfinder may make the CCD-TR400 *more*, rather than less attractive, for some videographers.

SONY CCD-TR400 Hi8 CAMCORDER

PRICE: $1,399

V-RATING: VVVVV

RATINGS ARE RELATIVE TO THOSE FOR OTHER Hi8 CAMCORDERS

My first experience with the TR400 was one of those instances where you take an immediate liking to a piece of equipment.

Multiburst pattern showing frequency response of CCD-TR400 which is very good for Hi8.

While the TR500 is a decent camcorder, it has some irritating flaws, especially in the area of manual overrides. The focus/iris thumbwheels on the TR500's somewhat flimsy pop-out panel make it an unappealing choice if you use the thumbwheels often.

The TR400 harkens back to the heyday of the CCD-TR101, where everything you needed was right there in your hand. It doesn't offer quite the versatility of

continued on page 45

TOSHIBA 16:9 REAR-PROJECTION TV

By Brent Butterworth

The rear-projection set I watch the most isn't the one with the best picture. Why? Because the set—a Panasonic PT-50WXF5—uses a 16:9 aspect ratio.

Most sets have a 4:3 (or 1.33:1) aspect ratio. But the wider, 16:9 (1.77:1) ratio is closer to those of letterboxed movies, most of which run from 1.85:1 to 2.35:1. When you watch a letterboxed movie on a conventional set, you get black bars on the top and bottom of the picture. But with a 16:9 set, the bars are eliminated on 1.85:1 movies, and diminished on movies with wider ratios.

Big deal, you say? Well, it makes much more of a difference than I ever imagined. On a rear-projection set, the 16:9 ratio makes watching letterboxed movies much more of a theatrical experience. For me, it's enough to overcome the fact that the PT-50WXF5 doesn't have the best picture I've seen.

Toshiba tries to solve this dilemma with its first 16:9 rear-projection set, the 56-inch TW56D90. It's a top-of-the-line model with a Dolby Pro-Logic sound system, front inputs, picture-in-picture and other high-end features.

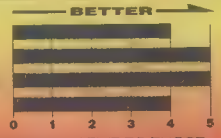
The picture size button switches between normal (4:3 with bars on the sides), theater (which fills the screen horizontally and crops off the top and bottom—the mode you'll use most) and full, which stretches a 4:3 picture to fill the screen horizontally. There's also picture-outside-picture, which scans three channels at a time in small windows on the right

continued on page 42

TOSHIBA TW56D90 56-INCH WIDESCREEN TV SET

PRICE: $4,995

V-RATING: VVVV



RATINGS GIVEN ARE RELATIVE TO THOSE FOR OTHER REAR-PROJECTION TV SETS.

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Price: $4,999

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 357 lbs., 59 x 55 x 25-1/4 inches

Power Consumption: 283 watts average

Screen Size: 56 inches diagonal 16:9 (48-3/4 inches wide x 27-1/4 high)

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Speaker Size: front—two 6-1/4 inches round, rear—two 4 inches round

Broadcast Tuning Range: 2 to 13, 14 to 69

Cable Tuning Range: 125 channels—2 to 13, A-8 to A-1, A to W, AA to ZZ, AAA, BBB, 65 to 94, 100 to 125

Remote Control: IR wireless main remote with command learning commands for TV, VCR and auxiliary device; plus IR wireless simplified remote with buttons for power, volume, channel and input select

Jacks: front—S-video/video/stereo audio input; rear—S-video/video/stereo audio input, video/stereo audio input, 2 RF (antenna/cable) inputs, RF output (loop-through of RF input 1, for feeding cable box), video/stereo audio output, variable-level stereo audio output

External Speaker Connectors: spring-loaded clips for front and rear speakers

Internal Audio Amplifier Power: front—14 watts per channel stereo, rear—10 watts per channel stereo

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 650 lines

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): luminance 55.7, video 55.1, chroma AM 61.7, chroma PM 62.1

Screen Brightness: 78 footlamberts

Color Temperature: 8,500 Kelvin at normal factory setting, 6,500 at memory factory setting

Accuracy of Colors: excellent

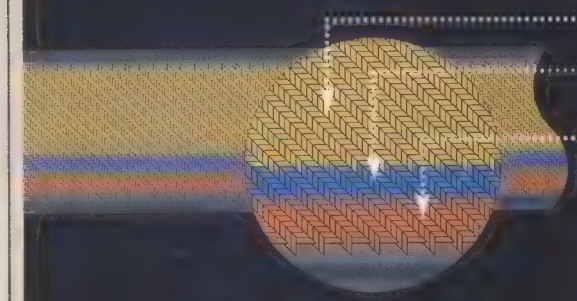
Audio Frequency Response: 20 Hz-15 kHz, -3 dB line out; -3.7 dB at 20 kHz

Audio S/N: 68.9 dB line out

Total Harmonic Distortion: 0.2% line out

SONY
ONY
SONY VIDEO LE
REC
Creative Control.
Hi8

Control the Final Cut. As the leader in camcorders, Sony understands their vast creative potential — capability you can unlock with editing control. Editing enables you to establish the precise pacing, shape and flow of your video. And editing raises the level of your productions from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Now this creative control can be yours, with Sony's Rewritable Consumer (RC) Time Code editing system. Shoot with Sony's CCD-TR700 Hi8™ Handycam® Camcorder. Edit onto the EV-S7000 Hi8 Editing VCR. And control them both with the RM-E1000T Editing Controller/Titler. Together, they form an RC Time Code editing system that brings out the full measure of your video creativity. By letting you control the final cut.



RC Time Code occupies its own, separate portion of the tape. It can be added or rewritten onto a tape without affecting existing audio or video signals.

The CCD-TR700 Hi8 Handycam Camcorder.

It's small. It's compact. But its features make a big impression. Presenting the Sony CCD-TR700. Of course, there's Hi8 video recording and RC Time Code. But there's also SteadyShot™ picture stabilization to reduce the effect of camera shake. Unlike some other systems, SteadyShot stabilization holds the picture rock steady without degrading the image. And it continues to work in low light and while zooming. The CCD-TR700 even improves your view of life. The Advanced Color Viewfinder is a high-resolution color LCD with an optical filter for lifelike monitoring.

The RM-E1000T Edit Controller.

A/B roll editing. Audio fades. Video fades. Video titles in 8 colors. 99 segment Edit Assembly. And RC Time Code synchronized control for three A/V inputs. That's what the RM-E1000T is all about. Total creative control.

The EV-S7000 VCR can automatically assemble eight video clips in any sequence you desire.

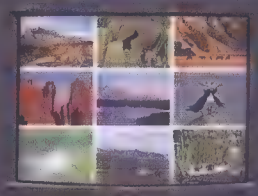
The Precision of RC Time Code. Thanks to RC Time Code, the CCD-TR700 Handycam® Camcorder automatically identifies each individual video frame by hour, minute, second and frame number. As you shoot, RC Time Code is recorded in digital form, right on the tape. So when you edit, you won't be depending on a display that refers only to the elapsed time in seconds. With RC Time Code, you'll always be able to return by frame number to the exact image you seek. ■ ■ ■ With the CCD-TR700 as Player and an EV-S7000 as Recorder, you'll hit your edit points within an accuracy of ±5 frames. With two EV-S7000 VCRs – one as Player, one as Recorder – you'll come within ±1 frame. That's accurate within 1/30 second. And because RC Time Code is rewritable, you can lay time code onto tapes recorded by other 8mm camcorders or overwrite new code onto already edited tapes, without disturbing the video or losing a generation. ■ ■ ■

The Performance of Hi8 Video. Hi8 video is supremely well-suited to shooting and editing. Because they record at 3.6 times the density of VHS, Hi8 camcorders can be considerably more compact without sacrificing picture quality or recording time. Horizontal resolution is 400 lines – better than even television broadcasting. Stereo sound is spectacular, thanks to AFM hi-fi stereo when you shoot and PCM digital stereo when you dub audio. Finally, unlike the 30-minute limit of VHS-C, a Hi8 videocassette lets you record up to 3 hours at standard speed. No wonder Sony Hi8 camcorders have become so successful with discriminating videophiles, corporate videographers, event videographers and TV news teams. ■ ■ ■ Video can be an incredible creative tool. One that informs. Persuades. Educates and entertains. That's why Sony brings you Hi8 video quality and RC Time Code editing precision. They help you turn your creative potential into creative results.

The EV-S7000 Editing VCR.

After you shoot with the CCD-TR700 edit with the EV-S7000. A leading video magazine called it "perhaps the most versatile and capable editing VCR [illegible]." By connecting the EV-S7000 to the CCD-TR700, you can enjoy high-quality video assemble up to 18 frames. You can identify up to eight video segments by RC Time Code. Then set the EV-S7000 Auto Assemble them at the touch of a button! And the EV-S7000 is engineered to get the most out of your VCR tapes. With Digital Time Base Correction, Digital Noise Reduction and a Dynamic Signal Filter for video pictures of astonishing clarity. Finally, two channels of PCM digital audio let you mix background music or narration with the camcorder's FM stereo tracks, for a total of four high fidelity tracks!

The Visual Index system of the EV-S7000 VCR provides an on-screen visual table of contents. In a single glance, you see pictures from up to 9 index-marked segments on the tape.



† Monitor inset simulated.

Features:

EV-S7000 Hi8 Editing VCR

- Video Hi8 system: over 400 lines of horizontal resolution
- RC Time Code for accurate editing
- AFM hi-fi stereo sound
- Digital PCM Stereo Sound with dubbing
- 8-segment Auto Assemble editing
- Digital Time Base Correction for a stable, clean video signal
- Jog / Shuttle Control for convenient, precise tape control
- Flying Erase™ head for clean picture transitions
- Digital Noise Reduction for cleaner video pictures
- Advanced Dynamic Signal Filter for sharpness and clarity
- Advanced Drop-Out Compensation Circuitry
- 3-Line Digital Comb Filter for reduced Y/C interference
- Narration microphone input
- 181 channel tuner** with 1-month/8-event timer
- VCR Plus+,™ timer programming with Cable Mouse™ unit: easy as dialing the phone
- Up to 6-hour recording time (LP mode) on a single Hi8 cassette

EV-S7000

CCD-TR700

Hi8 Handycam Camcorder

- Video Hi8 system: over 400 lines of horizontal resolution
- SteadyShot picture stabilization system
- RC Time Code / Data Code / Index System
- High-resolution advanced color viewfinder with optical filter
- AFM Hi-Fi stereo sound with stereo zoom microphone
- Manual focus ring, electronic manual exposure dial
- Auto Lock for fully automatic operation
- Optical 10:1 variable-speed power zoom lens (52 mm)
- 1/3" precision CCD with 410,000 pixels
- 4-mode Program Auto Exposure (AE)
- Flying Erase™ head for noise-free picture transitions
- Zoom, Battery, Tape, Exposure Meter in viewfinder
- Dimensions (WHD): 4-1/4" x 4-1/4" x 8-1/2"

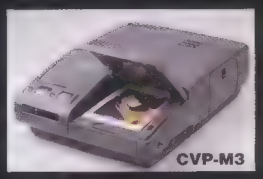
RM-E1000T Edit Controller

- RC Time Code for accurate editing
- A/B roll for editing from up to 3 players
- Floppy disk drive stores Edit Lists for future reference
- 99-segment Auto Assemble editing with RC Time Code
- On-screen menu for easy operation
- Video fade, monotone and cinema; audio mixing and fade
- 10-page digital superimposer with scroll and reverse
- Titling with two type fonts in 4 sizes, 8 colors
- VISCA™ interface for XV-D1000 Digital Effects Generator and computer editing systems
- S-Video inputs and outputs for editing with Hi8 decks
- Universal learning remote with 10 presets

Optional Accessories:

CVP-M3 Portable Color Video Printer

- *Makes quick prints from any NTSC video source*
- *High resolution (708 H x 448 V pixels) using full-frame digital memory*
- *Over 16.7 million colors, 24-bit color system yields 256 gradations each for yellow, magenta and cyan*


CVP-M3

SPK-TRA2

SPK-TRA2 Sports Pack

- *Splash and dust-resistant shell for CCD-TR700*
- *Electronic control of camcorder power on/off, zoom tele/wide, and record start/stop*
- *Water-resistant stereo microphone*

XV-D1000 Special Effects Generator

- *77 different wipe patterns for scene transitions*
- *Digital effects: Zoom, Mosaic, Multi-Picture, Strobe*

PHV-A7 Film-to-Video Converter

- *Up to 400 lines of resolution (Hi8 compatible)*
- *Fully-featured with 6x zoom lens, color corrector, S-Video output*

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- RC Time Code for accurate editing
- AFM hi-fi stereo sound
- Digital PCM Stereo Sound with dubbing
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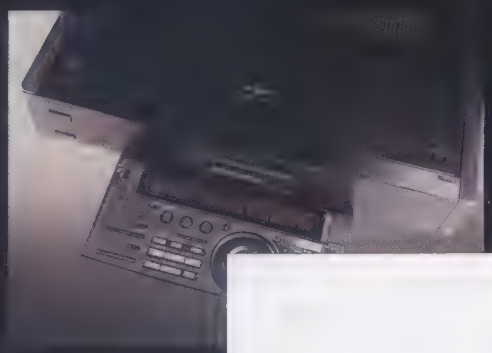

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CCD-TR700

Hi8 Handycam Camcorder

- Video Hi8 system: over 400 lines of horizontal resolution
- SteadyShot picture stabilization system
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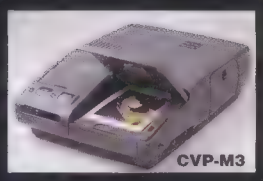

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XV-D1000 Special Effects Generator

- *77 different wipe patterns for scene transitions*

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PIONEER COMBI PLAYER

By Brent Butterworth

TEST 755

The Holy Grail of laserdisc players would be one that offers digital effects on CLV discs, automatic side-changing, an outstanding picture and real high-end sound, all at a reasonable price. Pioneer's CLD-97 fits the description, except that it costs $2,500.

PIONEER CLD-D703 COMBI PLAYER

PRICE: $1,220

V-RATING: VVVVV

RATINGS GIVEN ARE RELATIVE TO THOSE FOR OTHER LASERDISC PLAYERS.

What the video world really needs is a good $1,200 laserdisc player, but most of the ones we've tried suffer from a variety of picture-quality woes, many of which are caused by the digital signal processing needed to produce CLV effects.

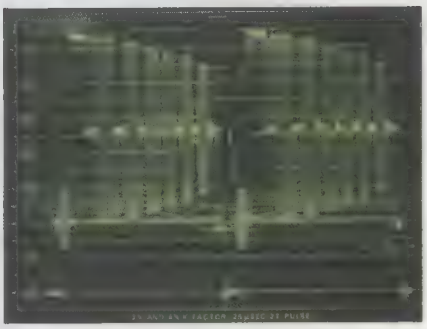
The CLD-D703 is Pioneer's latest $1,200 laserdisc player—$1,220, actually. Is it the Holy Grail? Let's find out....

The CLD-D703 has the two features most important to laserdisc aficionados: automatic side-changing and digital CLV effects. Automatic side-changing switches sides on a laserdisc automatically, saving you a trip to the equipment rack. Digital CLV effects let you get still frames, slow motion, speed play and clear forward and reverse scanning from CLV laserdiscs, which are by far the most common type.

Pioneer also added two features you'll like if you're an audio nut: a CD direct mode and a coaxial digital output. The CD direct mode engages a smaller, faster-moving, dedicated CD drawer, and shuts off all the video circuitry when you're playing CDs. This helps cut interference, for a significant audible improvement—you get a little more detail, and a little more sense of space.

Audiophiles consider a coaxial digital output sonically superior to the Toslink optical outputs found on most laserdisc players, because the coaxial output induces less jitter in the signal. You can use the coaxial output to feed a high-quality, stand-alone digital-to-analog convertor for better sound. There's still a Toslink output, though, which you might need if you want to feed a digital signal to pieces of equipment that only offer Toslink digital input, like Onkyo's TX-SV909PRO receiver.

The CLD-D703's remote is the same great one that comes with the CLD-97. It has a jog/shuttle dial, which makes it easy to scan backward or forward, and to step through a disc frame-by-frame. There's also a button on the side that illuminates the basic playback controls.



Multiburst pattern showing outstanding frequency response of the Pioneer CLD-D703 combi player.

Otherwise, it's pretty much like any other laserdisc player. You can program any order of CD tracks or laserdisc

continued on page 46

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Price: $1,220

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 19 lbs., 5-3/8 x 16-5/8 x 17-1/4 inches

Power Use: 41 watts

Disc Formats: 12- and 8-inch LD, 5-inch CD-Video, 5- and 3-inch CD

Direct Search: 5 sec. max. on one side, 12 sec. side change

Cue & Review Scan Search: 2x, 5x, 10x, 20x

Remote Control: IR wireless with some illuminated controls

Jacks: 2 S-video/video/stereo audio output, SR remote input and output (relays IR remote commands to/from other Pioneer equipment), Toslink optical digital output, coaxial digital output, 1/4-inch headphone

Program Start Locator/Index/Cue: frame, time, chapter/track and points A-B

Analog Audio: hi-fi AFM stereo/dual mono

Digital Audio: stereo/dual mono, using 1-bit D/A converters with double-step noise shaping

Key Features: automatic side-changing, digital effects on CLV discs, digital timebase corrector, adjustable luminance and chrominance noise reduction, digital audio level control, jog/shuttle dial, film mode (shuts off front-panel and onscreen displays

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 425 lines

S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted luminance 52.2, weighted luminance 59.4, unweighted video 52.1, weighted video 59.1, chroma AM 50.5, chroma PM 44.2

Audio Frequency Response: digital 10 Hz-20 kHz, -2.4 dB; analog 20 Hz-20 kHz, +3.2/-2.2 dB

Dynamic Range: 98.6 dB

Audio S/N: digital 104 dB (our measurement limit), analog 67.1 dB

Audio Distortion: digital 0.002%, analog 0.03%

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PROTON 31-INCH TV

By Brent Butterworth

There aren't any direct-view TV manufacturers you could really call high-end companies, with one exception: Proton. Proton enjoys one of the strongest reputations in video—its TV sets have all been solid performers. The last Proton set we tested, the 27-inch VT-295, had an excellent picture, marred only by a too-dark contrast screen that made it tough to watch except in a very dim room. Newer Proton sets, like the 31-inch NT-339, solve the problem by using a lighter tint on the screen.

A contrast screen is a separate, tinted piece of glass that covers the face of the picture tube of a direct-view TV. The screen has three benefits: It increases contrast, improves color saturation and reduces the visibility of horizontal scan lines, which grow more distracting as screen size increases. Most of today's direct-view TVs feature instead a dark-tinted picture tube, which provides the first two benefits, but not the latter. The NT-339's contrast screen is removeable; it slides out vertically.

PROTON NT-339 31-INCH DIRECT-VIEW TV SET

PRICE: $2,400

V-RATING: VVVV

RATINGS GIVEN ARE RELATIVE TO THOSE FOR OTHER DIRECT-VIEW TV SETS

Like most other high-end direct-view sets, the NT-339 offers a plethora of inputs and outputs, including a front-panel input; dual-tuner picture-in-picture, so you don't have to hook up an external tuner or a VCR to watch two TV shows at once; a separately powered woofer to boost the bass; and surround sound modes.

Its front-panel headphone jack carries the normal TV sound, but when PIP is activated, it carries the sound from the picture in the PIP window. This way, two people can watch and listen to two

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Price: $2,400

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 164 lbs., 26-3/8 x 32-1/2 x 22 inches

Power Consumption: 200 watts

Screen Size: 31 inches diagonal

Aspect Ratio: 4:3

Speakers: two 2 x 5-inch front-firing, single 4-inch top-firing woofer in folded enclosure

Broadcast Tuning Range: 2 to 13, 14 to 69

Cable Tuning Range: 125 channels—A-8, 2 to 13, A to W, AA to ZZ, AAA, BBB, 65 to 94, A-5 to A-1, 100 to 125

Remote Control: IR wireless with an LED transmit indicator

Jacks: front—S-video/video/stereo audio input, 1/8-inch headphones; rear—2 S-video/video/stereo audio inputs, video/stereo audio input (parallel with front jacks), 2 RF (antenna/cable) inputs, S-video/video/stereo audio output, variable-level stereo audio output

External Speaker Connectors: spring-loaded connectors for left and right

Internal Audio Amplifier Power: 5 watts per channel stereo into 8 ohms, 18 watts into 8 ohms for woofer

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 560 lines

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): luminance 55.4, video 54.3, chroma AM 63.1, chroma PM 62.8

Screen Brightness: 34.5 footlamberts

Color Temperature: 5,600 Kelvin at factory preset

Accuracy of Colors: very good

Audio Frequency Response: line 20 Hz-20 kHz, +0/-3.8 dB

Audio S/N: line 70.7 dB, speaker terminals 53.1 dB with bass boost off, 55.1 dB with bass boost on

Total Harmonic Distortion: line 0.1%, speaker terminals 0.2%

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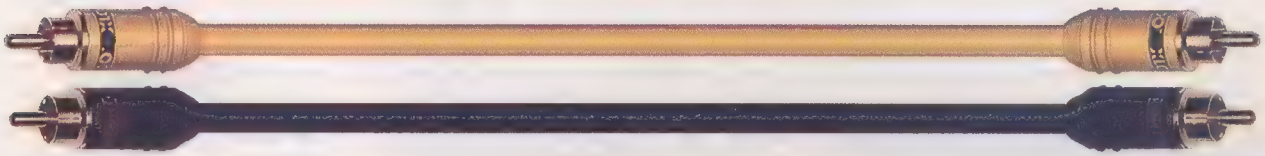

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The remote is of the same snazzy, ergonomically sane design as past Proton remotes, with a rubber "grip-strip" running around most of its perimeter. The buttons are all the same size, but color-coding makes them easy to identify. Unfortunately, it's not a universal remote—it won't control a VCR or a TV. Proton also doesn't supply a second, simplified remote—almost a standard feature of high-end TVs.

Properly adjusted, the NT-339's picture is quite enjoyable, with very good detail and depth, and practically no noticeable noise. Technical editor Lancelot Braithwaite measured the color temperature at factory preset at a surprisingly low 5,600 degrees Kelvin. Compared to my color reference, a Pro-Scan PS27152 calibrated to the NTSC standard of 6,500 degrees Kelvin, the NT-339 came fairly close—it is considerably more accurate than typical consumer TVs. Its only problem is a slight greenish tinge we couldn't dial out with the color and tint controls.

For me, Proton picked just the right shading for this contrast screen—dark enough to enhance contrast, but light enough to allow use in normal room light. The NT-399 has one problem in the areas of contrast and brightness—the black level falls off somewhat in the corners. If you set the contrast and brightness controls with a full-screen pluge pattern (see July's "Home Theater" column), the brightness (or black level) setting will be way off on the lower-right-corner pluge found on SMPTE color bars. I found a compromise setting to be quite watchable, however.

Fed through the composite video inputs, the NT-339 produces considerable dot crawl. Engaging the set's 3.58-megahertz (the frequency of the color signal carrier) trap got rid of most of the crawl. However, many competing sets offer advanced comb filters that do a better job.

The sound is okay, but not as good as I expect from a $2,400 TV. The main speakers sound like conventional TV speakers, and the woofer doesn't offer as much bass extension as many other integral TV woofers I've heard. The surround settings offer modes for music, movies and mono. For Dolby Surround movies, I found the music setting gave the most pleasing effect. But these modes are considerably simpler and much less dramatic than those on many competing TVs.

Because I liked its picture and because of the dual-tuner PIP (by far, the most important aspect of a TV), the NT-339 would be a nice set to own, especially if you use a separate surround-sound system. But it lacks two features I expect in a $2,400 31-inch TV: true surround sound and a universal remote. We've recently tried 31- and 32-inch models from Sony, Panasonic and Toshiba that have these features and offer comparable performance for the same price or a couple hundred less. ■

TECH TIPS

Once around

When renting a video, fast forward and rewind a tape before viewing it. In play mode, a VCR warms up and so does the tape; when it's rewound and returned in this condition, the tape has not been spooled evenly. Audio and video quality are better when the tape has been rewound cool.

Johnny L. Reese
Boone, North Carolina

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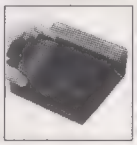

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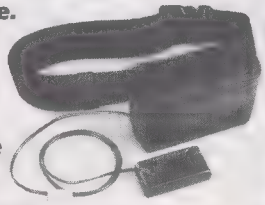

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WIDESCREEN TV

continued from page 34

side while maintaining a 4:3 picture.

The full mode is intended for anamorphic material—16:9 pictures "squeezed" to fit in a 4:3 frame. The only anamorphic material currently available is footage shot with camcorders having an anamorphic 16:9 mode (Hitachi, RCA and Panasonic offer several such models), and anamorphic laserdiscs. For now, we know of only two such discs—versions of *Free Willy* and *Unforgiven* specially created by Toshiba. You get both free when you buy a TW56D90. Strangely, both are 2.35:1 movies—I can't imagine why Toshiba chose them as demo material, because they still have bars on top and bottom in full mode.

Within the theater mode, you can choose normal widescreen mode, or two more modes that contract and expand the picture vertically. You can also scroll the picture up and down. Aspect-ratio geeks—the guys who drone on for hours about safety zones and matting, and can rattle off a dozen different names for the 2.35:1 ratio—may love this stuff, but I found no use for it.

When you put a conventional 4:3 picture on a 16:9 set, the 16:9 set has to either crop off the top and bottom, add bars to the sides, or stretch it to fit. JVC uses the stretching idea, which I find produces unacceptable distortion. Panasonic frames the picture with light gray bars I find distracting. (It uses light gray instead of black to minimize burning-in of the bar pattern on the picture tubes.) Toshiba also uses light gray bars, but when the set is properly calibrated, they turn dim brown, which doesn't bother me as much.

Dual Remotes: The TW56D90 comes with two remotes—a small, simplified model, and a larger model with a full set of controls and backlighting.

The TW56D90 is about as high as a 50-inch rear-projection set, but a few inches wider. The front panel has convergence controls, an A/V input for camcorders, and channel, volume and menu controls. There are glass-doored cubbyholes for two source components at the bottom. The rear jack panel has two A/V inputs (one with S-video), an A/V output, a variable-level output (for use with external amplifiers) and a loop-through connection for a cable box.

The remote control has a button on the side that illuminates many of the controls. Buttons for audio and video adjustments hide under a sliding flap. The remote can memorize control codes for a cable box, a VCR and one more component.

Toshiba gave the TW56D90 lots of high-tech guts in pursuit of a good picture, like negative radius picture tubes, a black level expander and a 3-D (horizontal, vertical and interframe) comb fil-

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ter. By and large, its efforts paid off.

The most striking thing about the TW56D90's picture is that it's pretty close to the NTSC 6,500-degree-Kelvin color temperature standard. The color rendition is the best I've seen from a rear-projection set—next to the TW56D90, most consumer TVs (including the PT-50WXF5) look like they're rendering various shades of blue, rather than accurate color—provided, of course, that you calibrate the TW56D90 with color bars and a blue filter, and turn the brightness and contrast way down from the factory settings. You can use the set's picture setting memory to get a "by-the-book" picture, and switch to the very bright factory preset when there's lots of ambient light.

I was also struck by the depth of the picture—it has more of a 3-D look than most rear-projection sets I've seen. However, the horizontal scan lines on a set this big can be bothersome. Panasonic gets around the problem with a line interpolater; Pioneer, Sony and RCA use contrast screens to get rid of the lines. This set would look great with a contrast screen; I hope Toshiba or a third-party manufacturer will offer one.

The 3-D comb filter works well, although it's not the best I've seen. I only noticed a tiny amount of dot crawl when using the set's composite video inputs. The video noise was very slight, never distracting.

The problem with this set is a horizontal hot spot, a bright bar that moves when you move your head vertically. If your head is even with the vertical center of the screen, it's no problem. But if you move up or down, the picture looks uneven. It's especially noticeable in the 4:3 mode, in the bars on the sides.

The sound is hard to criticize—it's amazingly good for a TV set. There are integral amps for rear speakers, and Toshiba even throws in the rear speakers and some cable. You have several setup choices. In Dolby Pro-Logic normal mode, you hook up front and rear speakers to the TW56D90's speaker connectors, and use the set's speakers as the center channel. Dolby 3 mode is the same, but uses no rear speakers. In Dolby Pro-Logic phantom mode (which I preferred), the set's stereo speakers handle all the front-channel sound, and the rear speakers are used. There are also several music surround modes.

Watching surround-sound extravaganzas like *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, I was amazed to find the TW56D90's sound system didn't leave me pining for a component-based Pro-Logic system. Certainly, pans from speaker to speaker aren't as dramatic as with separates, mainly because you can't spread the TV's internal speakers apart. (I didn't spend much time using the Pro-Logic normal more and external speakers because I couldn't find any that bore sonic resemblance to the TW56D90's speakers.) But the internal speakers, augmented by an internal subwoofer, sounded surprisingly detailed and smooth. I normally don't like music surround modes, but these were okay—they added a degree of ambience unattainable using only TV speakers.

The TW56D90 is clearly the best 16:9 set I've encountered. Although the picture has its flaws, it's impressive for a rear-projection set. And the sound is good enough so that you don't absolutely need to buy a separate surround-sound system. For me, the deciding factor is the horizontal hot spot. I think I could probably live with it, but check out the effect carefully before you buy, and make sure you'll be able to watch the set with your head within a foot of the vertical screen axis. ■

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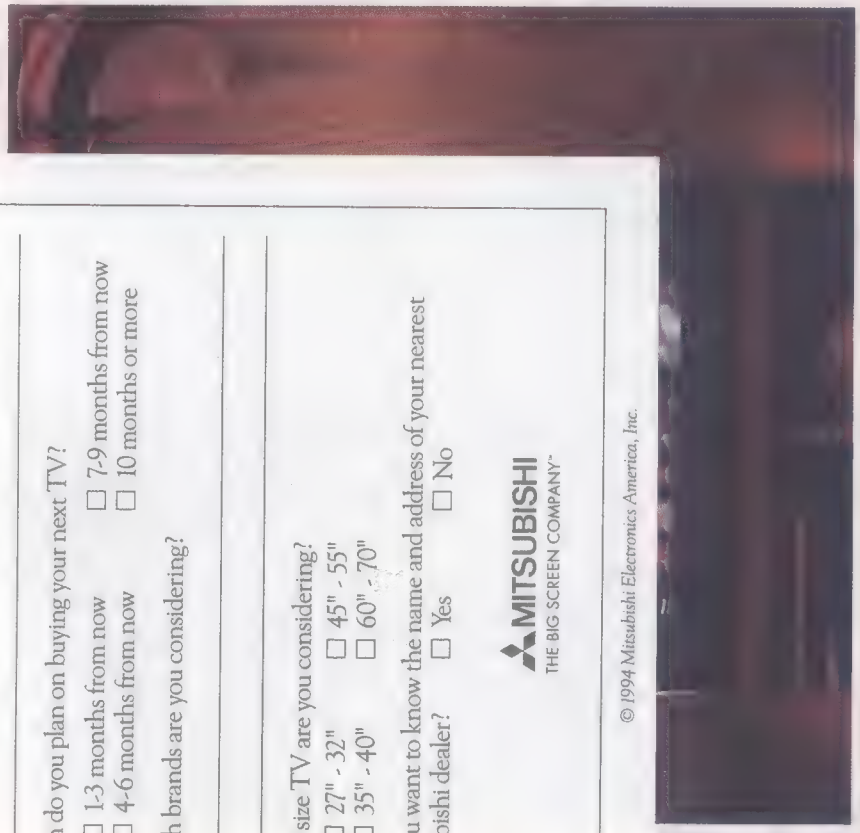

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WIDESCREEN TV

continued from page 34

side while maintaining a 4:3 picture.

The full mode is intended for anamorphic material—16:9 pictures "squeezed" to fit in a 4:3 frame. The only anamorphic material currently available is footage shot with camcorders having an anamorphic 16:9 mode (Hitachi, RCA and Panasonic offer several such models), and anamorphic laserdiscs. For now, we know of only two such discs—versions of *Free Willy* and *Unforgiven* specially created by Toshiba. You get both free when you buy a TW56D90. Strangely, both are 2.35:1 movies—I can't imagine why Toshiba chose them as demo material, because they still have bars on top and bottom in full mode.

Within the theater mode, you can choose normal widescreen mode, or two more modes that contract and expand the picture vertically. You can also scroll the picture up and down. Aspect-ratio geeks—the guys who drone on for hours about safety zones and matting, and can rattle off a dozen different names for the 2.35:1 ratio—may love this stuff, but I found no use for it.

When you put a conventional 4:3 picture on a 16:9 set, the 16:9 set has to either crop off the top and bottom, add bars to the sides, or stretch it to fit. JVC uses the stretching idea, which I find produces unacceptable distortion. Panasonic frames the picture with light gray bars I find distracting. (It uses light gray instead of black to minimize burning-in of the bar pattern on the picture tubes.) Toshiba also uses light gray bars, but when the set is properly calibrated, they turn dim brown, which doesn't bother me as much.

Dual Remotes: The TW56D90 comes with two remotes—a small, simplified model, and a larger model with a full set of controls and backlighting.

The TW56D90 is about as high as a 50-inch rear-projection set, but a few inches wider. The front panel has convergence controls, an A/V input for camcorders, and channel, volume and menu controls. There are glass-doored cubbyholes for two source components at the bottom. The rear jack panel has two A/V inputs (one with S-video), an A/V output, a variable-level output (for use with external amplifiers) and a loop-through connection for a cable box.

The remote control has a button on the side that illuminates many of the controls. Buttons for audio and video adjustments hide under a sliding flap. The remote can memorize control codes for a cable box, a VCR and one more component.

Toshiba gave the TW56D90 lots of high-tech guts in pursuit of a good picture, like negative radius picture tubes, a black level expander and a 3-D (horizontal, vertical and interframe) comb fil-

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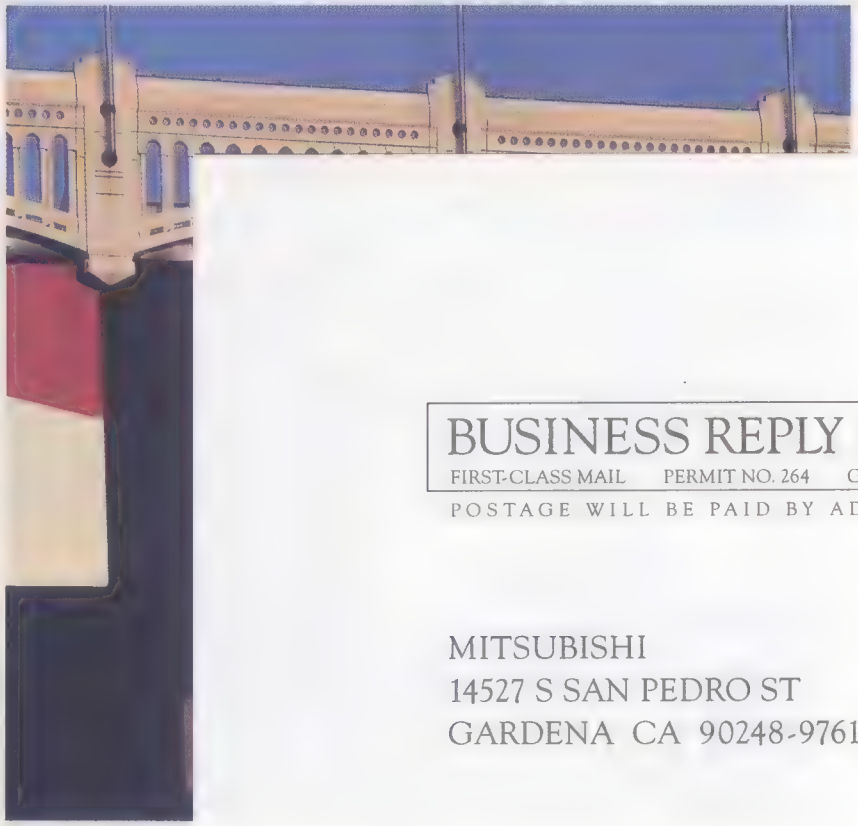

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ter. By and large, its efforts paid off.

The most striking thing about the TW56D90's picture is that it's pretty close to the NTSC 6,500-degree-Kelvin color temperature standard. The color rendition is the best I've seen from a rear-projection set—next to the TW56D90, most consumer TVs (including the PT-50WXF5) look like they're rendering various shades of blue, rather than accurate color—provided, of course, that you calibrate the TW56D90 with color bars and a blue filter, and turn the brightness and contrast way down from the factory settings. You can use the set's picture setting memory to get a "by-the-book" picture, and switch to the very bright factory preset when there's lots of ambient light.

I was also struck by the depth of the picture—it has more of a 3-D look than most rear-projection sets I've seen. However, the horizontal scan lines on a set this big can be bothersome. Panasonic gets around the problem with a line interpolater; Pioneer, Sony and RCA use contrast screens to get rid of the lines. This set would look great with a contrast screen; I hope Toshiba or a third-party manufacturer will offer one.

The 3-D comb filter works well, although it's not the best I've seen. I only noticed a tiny amount of dot crawl when using the set's composite video inputs. The video noise was very slight, never distracting.

The problem with this set is a horizontal hot spot, a bright bar that moves when you move your head vertically. If your head is even with the vertical center of the screen, it's no problem. But if you move up or down, the picture looks uneven. It's especially noticeable in the 4:3 mode, in the bars on the sides.

The sound is hard to criticize—it's amazingly good for a TV set. There are integral amps for rear speakers, and Toshiba even throws in the rear speakers and some cable. You have several setup choices. In Dolby Pro-Logic normal mode, you hook up front and rear speakers to the TW56D90's speaker connectors, and use the set's speakers as the center channel. Dolby 3 mode is the same, but uses no rear speakers. In Dolby Pro-Logic phantom mode (which I preferred), the set's stereo speakers handle all the front-channel sound, and the rear speakers are used. There are also several music surround modes.

Watching surround-sound extravaganzas like *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, I was amazed to find the TW56D90's sound system didn't leave me pining for a component-based Pro-Logic system. Certainly, pans from speaker to speaker aren't as dramatic as with separates, mainly because you can't spread the TV's internal speakers apart. (I didn't spend much time using the Pro-Logic normal more and external speakers because I couldn't find any that bore sonic resemblance to the TW56D90's speakers.) But the internal speakers, augmented by an internal subwoofer, sounded surprisingly detailed and smooth. I normally don't like music surround modes, but these were okay—they added a degree of ambience unattainable using only TV speakers.

The TW56D90 is clearly the best 16:9 set I've encountered. Although the picture has its flaws, it's impressive for a rear-projection set. And the sound is good enough so that you don't absolutely need to buy a separate surround-sound system. For me, the deciding factor is the horizontal hot spot. I think I could probably live with it, but check out the effect carefully before you buy, and make sure you'll be able to watch the set with your head within a foot of the vertical screen axis. ■

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8MM/VHS

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Hi8 playback capability which works, I'm pleased to say, very nicely. While not Hi8 quality, the images play and dub to VHS at standard 8mm resolution with no difficulty and with little generation loss. Oddly, the VHS side doesn't come with quasi-S-VHS playback—a minor but annoying limitation in a unit with so much to recommend it.

The titler is your basic one-page, white-only, block letter job with characters in four different sizes. It's a bit clumsy to operate, as you're required to page through the alphabet for each character, as with the character generators on older camcorders. While nobody will ever confuse the results with titles generated on a Videonics TitleMaker, it's nonetheless extremely useful for quick-and-dirty efforts. With so many camcorder manufacturers getting rid of even the most basic titler functions, GoldStar is to be commended for picking up the slack.

Another feature this VCR offers that too many camcorders don't any more is an external microphone input. By using the mix/mic button on the remote control, you can either record over existing audio or mix sounds from the mic input with it. Interestingly, there's no level control, which is puzzling, given the inclusion of mic mixing.

The infrared remote that comes with the GVR-DD1 is, despite its unusually boxy shape, very easy to use. It offers a complete set of controls, the more advanced of which are below a flip-up panel. Don't lose it, though—as with most VCRs these days, a large number of the functions don't have corresponding controls on the deck itself. This could be a problem, since few (if any) universal remotes come with buttons for assemble editing or A/V dubbing.

Probably the GVR-DD1's biggest drawback is its lack of hi-fi or any form of stereo audio. (Like all other 8mm equipment, the 8mm deck has hi-fi playback, but it's mono.) Its VHS linear monaural track is quite good for what it is. But it still isn't hi-fi or stereo, and you'll hear the difference on any stereo monitor. GoldStar should seriously consider adding stereo and hi-fi to future versions of this VCR.

The deck falls a bit short in picture quality, though, with only average results. In addition to the usual slight amount of chrominance noise in the reds, there also appears to be a slight shift in the blacks toward green. This occasionally results in odd yellowish-green casts showing up in the shadows, especially under people's mouths or eyes. But it's a subtle effect—it's there, but you have to be looking for it to notice. I found the effect consistent on two TVs, and found it unnoticeable when a tape recorded on the GVR-DD1 is played back on another VCR. Clearly, there's a minor problem somewhere in the playback electronics.

Cool Control: The GVR-DD1's remote controls the deck's 8mm and VHS transport mechanisms.

Despite these problems, GoldStar's GVR-DD1 is a truly remarkable VCR. Its easy-to-use interformat dubbing and editing capability, combined with its titling, its mic mixing and its ability to play Hi8 tapes back in quasi format, far outweigh its limitations. This is a very good piece of video gear which, with a little work, could become a truly great one. ■

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HI 8 CAMCORDER

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the TR101, which offers a full set of its manual overrides and a titler, but it nevertheless works well on the whole. Certainly semi-pros (for whom manual focus and iris control are essential) should take note.

The TR400's black-and-white CRT viewfinder makes it an anomaly in its class, where color LCD viewfinders are the rule. While a color LCD is arguably easier on the eyes, it doesn't offer the resolution of a black-and-white viewfinder, making focusing more difficult. The TR400 doesn't have a manual white balance for achieving more accurate color rendition, but if you're a manual-focus fanatic, the CRT may make this your camcorder of choice.

While the TR700 has moved forward with a faster, one-step tape-eject mechanism, Sony sticks with the slower mechanism of the TR101. For me, waiting for the tape to eject on the TR101 got old quickly. However, the TR400 does have a quick-sliding lens cover that slides out when the camcorder is turned off or put into VTR mode. This should have been included on the TR700.

Rejecting the newer, memory-free lithium battery technology available on the TR500, Sony has stuck with the nickel-cadmium battery on the TR400 to keep the price down. However, Sony compensates by including a very practical feature—an icon (in both the viewfinder and on the side display) that indicates battery life.

The TR400 has a menu system for auxiliary features. I found it more straightforward than most, with graphic indicator arrows to guide you. You can select an audible trigger warning, wind noise setting, date, clock and time zone functions, stereo/left/right and edit on/off (which minimizes picture deterioration when editing).

The TR400 has a two-speed zoom mechanism; press it lightly and it moves very slowly, harder and it moves quickly. I missed having the option of an intermediate speed.

There is no umbrella full auto switch as there is on the TR700 or TR101; if you want to switch the TR400 back to full auto, you have to reset each manual control you were using. On the TR400, the provision for manual focus is a vertical thumbwheel located at the bottom of the camcorder close to the lens, and a switch next to it. There is an auto setting, plus one for manual focus and a "push auto" switch which puts the camcorder in auto focus mode temporarily (while you are in manual mode) when you need a quick fix.

Bucking the Trend: Unlike most other manufacturers, Sony supplies relatively large remotes with its camcorders. This one operates the TR400.

Sony gives us four exposure presets, much like those available on the TR700 and the Canon ES-1000: portrait, sports, high-speed shutter and twilight. The TR400 also includes a manual iris which is push-buttoned on and controlled by another small thumbwheel closer to the back of the camcorder. I prefer iris control over manual shutter control—I think it makes the camcorder ultimately more versatile in day-to-

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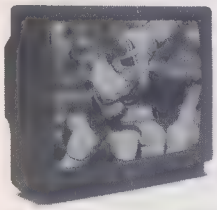

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Shutter Speeds (sec.): 1/60 (normal). portrait—1/60-1/2.000. sports—1/60-1/500. high speed shutter—1/4.000. twilight—1/60

Auto Fade: trigger operated to/from black or mosaic

White Balance: auto only

Viewfinder: black-and-white CRT

Viewfinder Controls: viewing angle. diopter focus

Microphone: stereo electret condenser

Jacks: S-video/video/stereo audio input/output. stereo 1/8-inch mic input. 1/8-inch headphones. LANC remote. DC out for RF convertor

Tape Speeds: SP. LP (play only)

Video Heads: 4.

Edit Search: bidirectional 1x

Cue & Review Search: approx. 9x forward. 7x reverse

Fast Forward/Rewind Time: approx. 6-1/2 min. for 120-min. tape

Edit Protocol: LANC

Remote Control: IR wireless with slide switch for hold. and camera and playback controls

Audio: hi-fi AFM stereo

Key Features: electronic image stabilizer. four auto exposure modes with manual iris. flying erase head

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 400 lines Hi8. 250 lines 8mm

S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted luminance 45.4 ME. 44.4 MP: weighted Hi8 luminance 49.7 ME & MP: unweighted video 43.2. weighted video 50.3: chroma AM 44.4. chroma PM 39.8

Minimum Illumination: 12.5 lux for 50 IRE (stabilizer off)

Approx. Battery Life (man. focus/no zoom): 55 min.

Audio Frequency Response: 50 Hz-7.5 kHz. +0/-3 dB: -9 dB at 20 Hz. -6.5 dB at 20 kHz

Hi-Fi Dynamic Range: 62.7 dB

Audio Distortion: 0.3%

day shooting situations.

The stabilization system offered is electronic with no noticeable image degradation when you switch it on. There is some drift, however, at the end of pans and tilts, which is more evident on slow camera movements.

Sony has included a fader (to black) which operates at the beginning or end of a shot. When you are in standby and push the fade button, the picture fades up when you go into record mode; when you are recording and push it, it waits until you go to standby mode before fading down.

The TR400 has some basic but important features that camcorder companies have been neglecting as they pursue point-and-shoot friendliness. Both external microphone and headphone jacks have been included, in contrast to their somewhat glaring omission on the much pricier ES-1000. As long as there's noise leakage on camcorders, we should have resort to these basics.

The sound quality is good, with very little transport noise audible, and none to mention on the zoom mechanism. However, we're still happy that there's a provision for improving the sound with an external mic. There is also an unusually clear stereo effect when using the onboard mic.

The picture quality was average—there was a noticeable amount of luminance noise, more than I noticed on the TR700 and the ES-1000, both of which I compared side-by-side with the TR400. I also noticed that in very low light, the color shifts toward green. However in normal conditions, color rendition is good. This is not a top-of-the-line picture, but considering the price, it stands up pretty well.

Overall, the TR400 makes a great date. Its few deficiencies are more than offset by the consideration with which Sony put this camcorder together and the number of manual features it offers. It's very straightforward, it includes well-chosen and well-placed controls (including the now-crucial image stabilizer) and adds some nice touches, like the sliding lens cover. Here, Sony draws on the TR line's rich history and strengths, and streamlines them into a sensible and very workable package. ■

COMBI PLAYER

continued from page 36

chapters you wish, and you can also use its CD deck synchro function for automated dubbing of CDs onto audio cassettes, provided you have a compatible Pioneer cassette deck.

After technical editor Lancelot Braithwaite finished his lab tests of the CLD-D703, he and I conducted double-blind picture and sound comparisons between it and the CLD-97. We've used the CLD-97 as our reference for laserdisc picture and CD sound for the last year. We've found some players that equal it in picture quality, and some mid-priced audiophile digital-to-analog convertors that equal it in sound, but we've yet to find a product we truly preferred in either area (outside of very pricey D/A convertors). That's why our comparisons of the CLD-D703 and the CLD-97 were perhaps the most startling we've conducted in a "Videotest."

The D703 actually produced a marginally better picture than the 97. We had to look hard for the differences, but they were there. The D703's picture seemed to have slightly better detail and

Light-Fingered: The remote that comes with Pioneer's CLD-D703 has a button on the side that lights up the main transport controls.

slightly fewer digital artifacts. Also, the 97 suffered from a small amount of chrominance-to-luminance delay—the color signal lags behind the black-and-white signal, producing a tiny amount of color bleeding on the right side.

Both produce a virtually noise-free picture that will please even the pickiest videophile, but the D703 definitely looked a bit better—at less than half the price. A comparison with the $3,500 LD-S2 produced similar results: advantage D703. Braithwaite's measurements back up our subjective impressions 100 percent—the numbers are the highest he's seen from a laserdisc player. The only complaint we have is that we really preferred the way digital effects were implemented on the late '80s Pioneer players—the older models offered smoother scanning (the CLD-D703's search is pretty jerky) and better resolution on still frames and slow motion.

The D703 has separately adjustable chroma and luminance noise reduction, which is a good idea, because noise reduction usually cuts down the detail. But we found adjusting the noise reduction had very little effect—a picture this clean doesn't really benefit from tweaking. So we did all our testing at the standard halfway setting.

The CLD-97 usually walks all over other laserdisc players sonically, so we expected it to kill the D703 in a double-blind A/B test with a high-end stereo system and CDs. The first time Braithwaite switched the players, I immediately assumed player number two was the CLD-97—it had a smoother, more analog-like sound, and created a deeper soundstage. Several more trials reinforced this impression, and Braithwaite concurred. Imagine our surprise to find out that player number two was the CLD-D703! The D703 also has somewhat tighter bass than the 97. (Braithwaite's audio measurements indicate solid performance, but we haven't found test results a reliable indicator of the performance of digital audio products.)

Braithwaite and I agree: The CLD-D703 is the best we've ever tried, truly the Holy Grail of laserdisc players. And it's priced at the industry norm for players with its feature package. Both of us think that if we had to buy a laserdisc player today, it would be this one. We hope Pioneer keeps the quality control on these players nice and tight, so more videophiles can enjoy the terrific picture and sound we experienced. ■

HANDS-ON

continued from page 24

To use the Smart Video Recorder, you'll need at least a 486SX-25 PC with four megabytes of RAM that runs Windows 3.1, a 256-color VGA display and *lots* of hard disk space. While the system requirements say you need 30 MB, for practical purposes you'll actually want about five times that much. Video files are memory hogs—a typical one-minute capture at 15 frames per second takes up more than eight MB, even after recompression!

Installing the Smart Video Recorder in your PC is fairly straightforward. The installation documentation is, by and large, clear and well-written, and the setup software is designed to detect possible interrupt and address conflicts. If you follow the instructions precisely, you shouldn't have any problems getting things up and running.

In addition to the board's setup software, the Smart Video Recorder package also comes bundled with *Video for Windows 1.1* (which is required to use the card), along with Asymetrix's *Compel* and *MediaBlitz* software for creating business presentations and multimedia shows, and Firstlight's *Gatekeeper* presentation software. Except for *Gatekeeper*, which is bundled on CD-ROM only, all bundled software comes on both 3.5-inch disk and CD-ROM.

The quality of images captured using the Smart Video Recorder is excellent for digitized computer video, from either S-VHS or VHS tapes, with accurate (although slightly muted) colors and sharp but non-jaggy images. The board has composite and S-video inputs, but does not come with its own sound capture capability, although it's easily able to capture in-sync audio from your sound card.

Overall, Intel's Smart Video Recorder is an excellent purchase for anyone who wishes to create multimedia presentations. The lack of onboard audio capture is a minor inconvenience, given that this board does so much else so well. **—Tim Liebe**

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DAWN Of The SMALL DISH

BY JONATHAN TAKIFF

Being first in line to buy a red-hot new product lets you relish the novelty longer than most, admits LeMoyne Martin, general sales manager of the Lexus auto dealership in Jackson, Mississippi. But the honor also opens you to a measure of risk, he explains. "Even with the best new electronics, a little something might go wrong in early production." Not that Martin's complaining, but he should know. Martin, after all, is the first guy (or gal) in the land to step up and buy a Digital Satellite System, the first high-powered, digitally transmitted, direct-to-home satellite package to launch successfully in the U.S. This is the system you've probably been hearing about for a year or two, the one promising to beam laser-quality video to dishes no larger than a generous pizza pie.

Long in the dreaming and scheming, it's finally here, 13 years after the Federal Communications Commission set the race for direct broadcast satellites (DBS) in motion by doling out seven licenses. And nearly 50 years after futurist Arthur C. Clarke envisioned fixed-position satellites—the kind that hover over the equator—to harness private dishes to illuminate the world with programs.

Cable Alternative: RCA's Deluxe DSS system includes 18-inch Dish with two outputs, a set-top receiver and a universal remote.

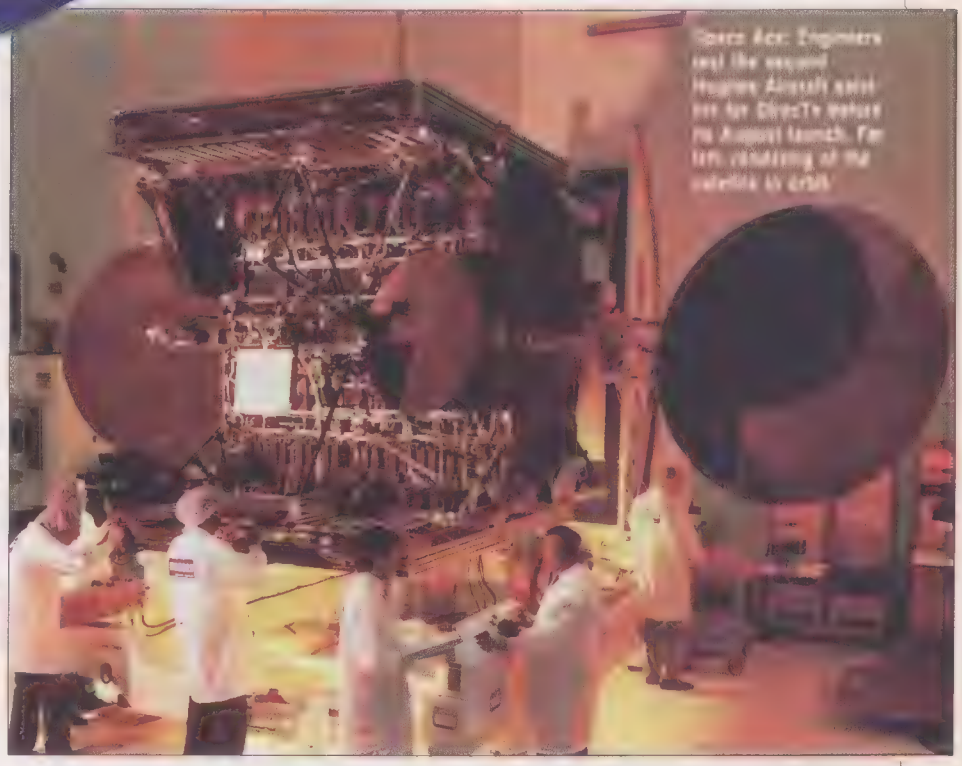
Many pundits predict that DSS will revolutionize communications by creating a new form of "personalized TV," with custom programs that are responsive to individual tastes and schedules. So it's no wonder LeMoyne Martin has been inundated with calls from media types and techies, ever since he risked his bucks to be the earliest adopter in the country.

A core DSS system by RCA—which consists of a small metal dish, a mount, a receiver and a remote control—sells for $699. But Martin, like two out of three early buyers, opted for RCA's primo $899 system, which includes a universal remote, a glass-reinforced plastic dish and a dual-output low-noise block converter capable of serving two TVs simultaneously with different programs. Martin would have opted for a second receiver, for an extra $649, "to complete the installation," except they weren't available at the time. "That's just something to accept when you're the guinea pig," says Martin, an amused tone in his voice.

Sales of the small-dish system began in a small way in June in Jackson, and a handful of other test cities. In August, the programming line-up was fleshed out with a second satellite's worth of channels, following a successful Space Shuttle launch at Cape Canaveral. Now, the system is rolling out region by region across the country. DSS should be available in most areas by late October and, by year's end, coast-to-coast.

Can 2 new digital satellite systems change America's viewing habits?

As it rolls out its menu of services, it will bring dozens of new and familiar channels, distant sports events and movie programs within reach of virtually every citizen (enjoying southerly exposure) in the contiguous 48 states and a fair chunk of Canada. (Factions in Canada are politicking to keep DSS out of the citizenry's reach, but DirecTv president Eddy Hartenstein believes a "soon to be an-



nounced" partnership with a Canadian company will help ease in DSS; as will DirecTv's three channels of Canadian-originated news and cultural programs.)

The DSS consortium consists of GM Hughes, which built the satellites; DirecTv, an arm of GM Hughes that supplies the programs; Hubbard Broadcasting's United States Satellite Broadcasting, which also provides programs using DSS; and Thomson Consumer Electronics' RCA manufacturing wing, which makes the DSS dish and receiver. Together, these companies have invested more than $1 billion to launch the system and position themselves as the first mass video providers on the electronic information highway.

They won't be the last. A consortium of cable companies called Primestar Partners is racing to compete with DSS by beefing up its existing larger-dish system and launching an aggressive advertising campaign. And other companies are likely to emerge if the services take off.

DSS distributes programs digitally via two high-powered satellites hovering 22,300 miles above the equator. Each satellite has 16 120-watt Ku-band transponders. To maximize capacity, an advanced digital compression system omits redundant information. This lets the system beam up to eight films or four live programs from a single transponder for decoding by a DSS receiver.

The DBS-1 satellite delivers upwards of 60 channels of DirecTv programs and 30 channels of USSB programs. The DBS-2 bird is used by DirecTv, as will be a third satellite, DBS-3, scheduled for launch next year. DirecTv programs are beamed to the satellites from a digital broadcast center in Castle Rock, Colorado, while USSB programs emanate from a facility in Oakdale, Minnesota.

LET'S DISH

LeMoyne Martin turned to DSS because he recently moved beyond his local cable system's reach and he was dissatisfied with the wireless cable offered in his area. He had no space for a colossal C-band dish, or for the 36-by-39-inch dish Primestar is using.

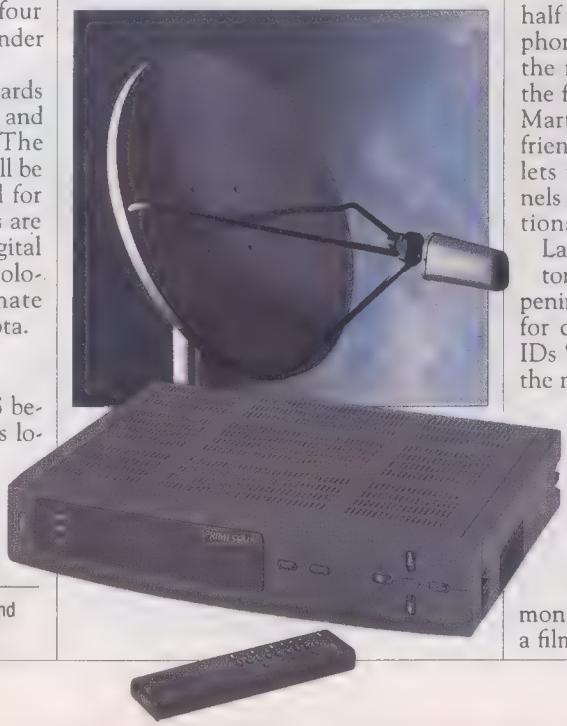
Is Martin satisfied? The earliest adopter raves about how his system was professionally installed "in just an hour and a half " (for an additional $199) and about how the 18-by-20-inch dish "disappeared between the peaks in my roof," satisfying the esthetic concerns of his neighborhood association. (A surprisingly high 40 percent of early DSS buyers are choosing to install the system themselves.)

Martin is even happier about the program options. Since he decided to use both DSS programmers, DirecTv and USSB, he can surf almost 150 channels of cable's best basics, hyperactive ("multiplexed") movie channels and pay-per-view options. With all the trimmings, programs cost Martin almost $80 a month, but subscribers can get away with just $8 through USSB's Essentials package if all they want is MTV and VH1, Comedy Central, Lifetime and the All News Channel.

Recent hit flicks are on Direct Ticket, priced at $2.99 ("same as at my video store," says Martin), and restart every half hour. "If you get called away for a phone conversation, you can move to the next channel in sequence showing the film and pick up where you left off," Martin notes. He also enjoys the "very friendly" onscreen program guide "that lets you search through favorite channels or program types, then get descriptions of programs if you want them."

Land the cursor on the title, tap a button and you're watching. Equally happening, says Martin, are the visual aids for channel grazers. Onscreen station IDs "immediately tell you the channel, the name of the program and how much time is left in the show, even if you've tuned in during the commercial."

Adding to the deal for DirecTv subscribers are a couple of program sweeteners—a no-charge bonus of 30 digital radio stations that use the DSS system, plus a monthly "socializing" coupon that buys a film for just 50 cents. Negotiations are

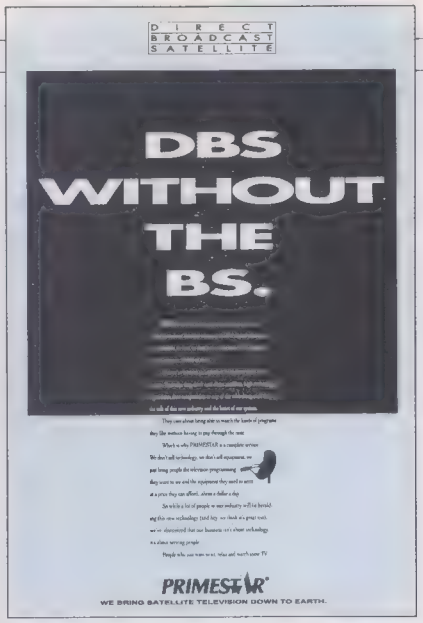


Ready to Receive: Primestar's 36-inch dish and new digital receiver, for leasing not purchase.

under way to acquire out-of-town sports channels and packages like NFL Sunday Ticket, an all-access pass to your favorite teams. Martin says he's been told it's "premiering on C-Band this year and coming to DSS next."

"Generally, the picture looks fantastic on my 52-inch Mitsubishi rear-projector and the sound through my stereo is as good as CD," enthuses the techno pioneer. "I have noticed some picture glitches—an occasional freeze-frame on a USSB movie channel, and a jumpy picture when the cameras switch during sports programs on a DirecTv channel. They've told me these things will be cured soon." Soon, in this case, means when the transmission system is upgraded later this year from MPEG-1 to more robust MPEG-2 data compression, says USSB executive vice president Rob Hubbard. DSS receivers are already set up for MPEG-2.

Martin says his dealer offered to refund his money if he was dissatisfied. "Are you crazy?" Martin said he replied. "I'm never giving this up."



Slugging It Out: Primestar's DSS attack ad.

GOING FOR BROKE

Who's going to watch using DSS? Someone better, because the mind boggles at the 2 million subscriber base DSS must reach before its investors start seeing green ink. But the chiefs are confident. USSB President Stanley E. Hubbard II believes "it's a slam dunk," while DirecTv's Hartenstein argues that $1 billion "is a bargain, next to the $100 billion-plus it will cost to wire the nation with fiber-optic cable into the next century."

The estimated 10 to 12 million homes beyond cable's reach are prime targets for DSS, and it helps that the powerful National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative has contracted to find them. The NRTC, which was created to deliver phone services to rural areas, has already ordered several hundred thousand DSS systems, with programming to be sold under its own name. NRTC reaches out to about 5 million potential subscribers, although most homes in NRTC areas already own 7-to-10 foot C-Band dishes and subscribe to C-band program services. They're enjoying the luxury of 300

First Look At Small Dish TV

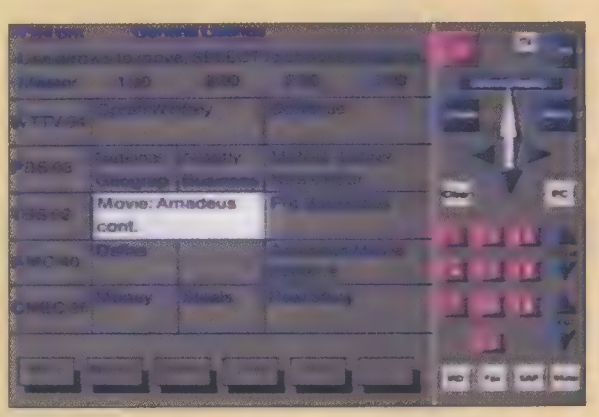
BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

We've heard promises about small-dish satellite service for years, only to see one after another melt into vaporware. That's a real drag in our office building, which has been shunned by the cable company, and in which we can just barely receive broadcasts. So when an RCA DSS dish and receiver arrived in our freight elevator, we immediately ripped open the box so we could install the thing and start watching! (We'll be taking a look at Primestar's dish and receiver in next month's issue.)

RCA provides almost everything you need—you supply only the cable from the dish to the receiver, and bolts to secure the dish to an exterior wall, a roof, a pole or anywhere with a clear shot at the southern sky. You'll also need a 1/2-inch wrench, a Phillips screwdriver, a compass and a plumb bob. RCA put a lot of thought into the installation manual, as it spells out every step clearly, and takes you through every installation option you can imagine. If you're the home improvement type, you should have no trouble installing DSS. For most, the toughest part will be running the cable.

Pointing the dish took me about five minutes. When you punch in your zip code (or latitude and longitude), the receiver's onscreen menu tells you the correct dish elevation angle and azimuth (compass heading). Once the dish is roughly aimed, you use the receiver's onscreen signal meter to tweak it. You can gauge signal strength from a display and from a test tone, which is intermittent when the aim is off, steady when it's correct.

The receiver plugs in like a laserdisc player, except that you have to connect the dish cable and a phone



What's On? Flexible onscreen program guide for the DSS system.

line to it. It has two composite video/stereo audio outputs, an S-video output, an RF input and output (for TVs with no baseband video inputs) and two computer-type data outputs that are not discussed in the manual. The front has a slot for the Access Card (also called the Smart Card), which comes with the receiver and must be in for the receiver to work. There are also front-panel controls for power and the menu system. The $899 DOD2R30W receiver we tried is the deluxe model—it comes with a programmed universal remote that also controls a TV set, a cable box, a VCR and a laserdisc controls four other components: a TV set, a cable box, a

continued on page 88

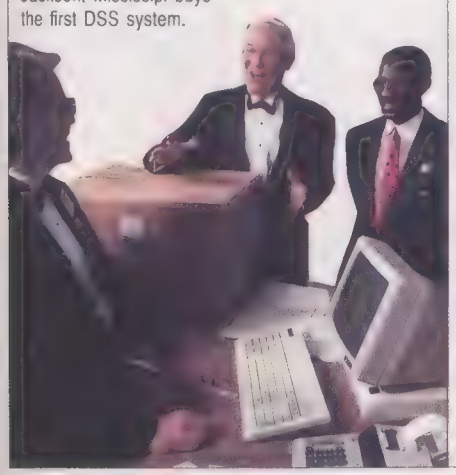
channels spread among 30 satellites, and are unlikely DSS candidates. Yet for ease of use and other considerations, some C-Band homes may opt to downsize to a DSS dish, which requires no antenna shifting to tune in its channels.

DSS backers also hope to lure many of the 20 million homes that can but choose not to buy cable services. "For the first time, you'll be able to buy HBO without having to first pick up $21 to $23 worth of basic programming," notes Hartenstein. Better yet, the DSS edition of HBO (which is actually sold by USSB and coveted by DirectTv) "is a five-channel zoned version, carefully counter-programmed for variety," according to Hartenstein. Yet it costs the same $10.95 it would normally take to buy just one channel of HBO on cable.

Viewers may also decide to subscribe to DSS services to complement existing cable reception, which DSS services will encourage by providing channels not otherwise available, like CNN International, Canada's MuchMusic and the (oft-banned) Playboy Channel. Conceivably, this bouncy new baby dish service could also appeal to the masses of cable subscribers who declare themselves ticked off and fed up.

There's one major shortcoming: DSS and all other satellite broadcast services cannot legally deliver programs broadcast over the off-air networks—that's ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS and Fox—to area codes where local network affiliates can be received through the air. The five net PrimeTime 24 package is only available (at $3.95) in the so-called white ar-

First on the Block:
LeMoyne Martin (right) in Jackson, Mississipi buys the first DSS system.



DSS And Primestar

Buying And Installing

If you're considering the DSS or Primestar systems, here's a quick guide to what you'll be getting and how they're installed. The basic DSS system costs $699 and includes the DSS receiver, a remote, the parabolic dish with mounting foot, Smart Card authorization, audio/video and S-Video outputs, antenna/cable input switching, a wide band data port (for future HDTV reception), a modem and a phone connector. The Deluxe System at $899 has an upgraded receiver with a low-speed data port, a second set of A/V outputs, gold-plated jacks, and a universal remote. The dish has a reinforced reflector and twin low-noise block (LNB) convertors to feed signals to two TVs for independent operation.

Professional installation, which is recommended, takes about two hours and costs $150 to $200. The service includes grounding the dish and securing it to an exterior wall, chimney or roof, plus up to 100 feet of cable and connections to an existing antenna or cable, a TV and phone lines. Extras include underground cable burial, fishing the wire through walls, and wall plates. Self-installation is recommended only if "you're very handy and feel comfortable on a ladder." For do-it yourselfers, there's a $70 parts kit with a how-to video, an instruction manual, roof connectors, 100 feet of cable with all-weather connectors, two 20-foot phone lines, a grounding block, waterproof sealant, and a compass for pointing the dish due south.

Grounded:
RCA recommends installation by a pro, but also sells an installation kit for do-it-yourselfers.

The telephone outlet is needed since programmers briefly poll your receiver once a month (in the middle of the night) for pay-per-view billing information. If there's no phone jack near the receiver, RCA offers a two-module system ($99) that plugs into AC outlets, which then transmits phone calls through your home's power lines to a phone outlet. An off-air antenna or cable wire can also be connected to the receiver.

If you're installing two DSS receivers, you'll need to run separate lines from the dish to both TVs. A line splitter can be used to send signals from the local antenna or cable TV. (All basic cable channels must now be sent in the clear, without scrambling.) If you're planning the DSS system for a whole house, you'll want to run two RG-6 cables between the dual output dish and a location that can serve as the head-end. Connect the cables and off-air antenna line to a Channel Master MultiSwitch (model 62041FB or 63041FB), which can cable feed up to four output signals to individual receivers. (Tap off unused switch ports with 75 ohm coaxial terminators.) Channel Master DiPlexers at each receiver will allow you to switch between off-air and DSS programs.

The Primestar system is leased, not purchased outright, and comes with a package of programs starting at $30. It includes a General Instrument receiver, a dedicated remote, antenna/cable input switching, composite and A/V outputs, a phone modem and a jack connector. The receiver is upgradable to MPEG-2 digital compression with a plug-in module that's due next year. Reception is via a pole-mounted, 36-by-39-inch parabolic dish. The installation takes about three hours and costs about $150. It includes connecting the dish to a pole and sinking it in concrete footing, underground cable burial, wire fishing through walls and finished wall plates. Self-installation is not recommended. —JT

eas of rural America where network reception is nil. Exceptions are granted, but require plenty of determination and paperwork.

"If you live in an urban canyon with zero reception, you can petition your local station to grant you an exception," says DirecTv's Linda Brill. "But the vast majority of American homes can receive local stations very well with a rooftop antenna, which can be wired into a DSS receiver for one-button switching." In urban areas where over-the-air reception is ghost-ridden, DSS dealers are encouraging videophiles to supplement USSB or DirecTv program packages with basic "lifeline" cable services that bring in local channels for $6 to $13 a month (and that don't make cable companies much money.)

DISH WARS

Given these scenarios, it's no wonder the forward march of DSS has provoked fear and loathing among major cable operators like Tele-Communications Inc., Time Warner Cable, Comcast Cable, Continental Cablevision, Cox Cable Communications and Newhouse Broadcasting. For perhaps the first time, their cash cows may feel the sting of true competition. In response, this cable combine (with GE American Communications, which builds and launches satellites) is also plunging into the direct-to-home video delivery business. Their calling card is Primestar Partners, which is just completing a $250 million upgrade of its 20-channel analog system. Primestar's signals are transmitted via a medium-powered satellite with 16 50-watt Ku-band transponders. The signals are receivable by parabolic dishes 36 by 39 inches in diameter, which aren't nearly as suitable (or recommended) for window sills or roofs as the DSS dish.

With General Instruments' DigiCipher digital compression technology (described by GI as better than MPEG-1), it's offered its subscribers a "swap out" or exchange of new digital receivers for their old analog ones. The moves are making Primestar a more formidable competitor. It can now handle 70 video channels, six audio channels and a PC-data service; and, like DSS, it boasts "laser quality picture and CD quality sound."

Primestar's program packages pale next to the DSS options, not to mention the nearly 200 channels DSS will offer when it launches a third satellite. And it has none of the Viacom offerings that are USSB plums – from MTV to Nickelodeon, Nick At Nite and The All News Channel (which Hubbard partly owns). On the other hand, Primestar goes 14 channels deep with regional sports stations that are conspicuously absent from DirecTv's initial lineup.

While DirecTv is dedicating 40 channels to pay-per-view films, with recent hits restarting every half hour, Primestar has 11 pay-per-view channels. Primestar also plans another upgrade – either to Tempo's high-powered bird or to new (as yet unlaunched) medium-power GE satellites, which will give it a maximum of 150 channels. But nothing's cooking until Primestar's current satellite burns out in late 1996.

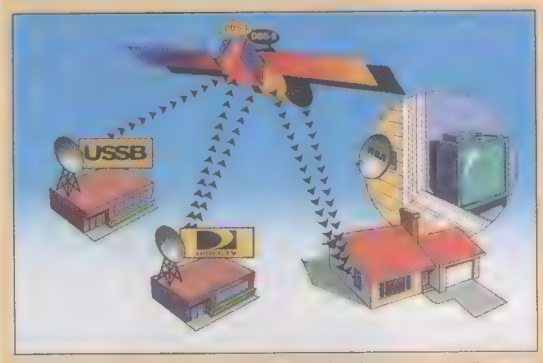
In suburbia and beyond, Primestar president John Cusick sees the "size of the lawn sculpture" (dish to ordinary folks) as a "non-issue." He also suggests subscribers will be responsive to his company's way of doing business. Like cable companies, Primestar leases the receiving equipment to subscribers as part of a monthly program package "rather than forcing people to buy something which might be obsolete next year." The fees are $30 to $50 a month, with pay-per-view movies $4 or $5 each. A one-time installation fee of about $150 is charged. But service calls and upgrades are free, and the customer's only responsibility is to make sure no one walks off with the post-mounted, cement-footed dish.

Primestar needed all summer to upgrade its 70,000 customers, which it has been signing up in 40 test markets, in-

What's On First – The Program Story

There are no program exclusives in space or on the ground, thanks in part to the Cable Act of 1992 and a consent decree signed by Primestar Partners to end an antitrust investigation. Every cable channel is fair game for grabbing and retransmitting by at least one direct broadcast satellite service. While pals in public, DirecTv and the National Rural Television Cooperative are both asking the Federal Communications Commission for the right to "econ-pack" some of the same channels USSB now offers exclusively. USSB argues that it has agreements, which predate the Cable Act, to carry exclusively the channels in its orbital position, and that it's not interested for now in selling a joint package of programs. It prefers to bill customers separately for USSB services, thank you very much.

Even on the DSS system, the "personalized television" concept has its limits. Most channels are offered as parts of larger packages – the a la carte choices are primarily in pay-per-view land. "Our research says people prefer it that way," explains DirecTv president Eddy Hartenstein. "Just as they don't want to read through a huge menu, they'd prefer to just be given something good." Programmers, on the other hand, says USSB's Stanley Hubbard "want to be on every dish they can." For parents who'd rather do without *Beavis and Butthead* or *WWF Wrestling*, the DSS parental control system lets them lock out specific channels, and set rating limits and pay-per-view spending limits.



Channeling: The Hughes satellites transmit programs by DirecTv and USSB.

Video stores can breath a sigh of relief. They'll maintain the same two-to six-month "window" of exclusivity over DBS' nearly-on-demand movies that they enjoy over the pay-per-view channels on cable. Primestar's pay-per-view package, in fact, is a combination of the Request and Viewer's Choice cable packages. However, when widescreen HDTV broadcasts become available on DSS equipment, "there may be more incentive for studios to offer simultaneous movie premieres at the theaters and on DBS," suggests Hartenstein. —JT

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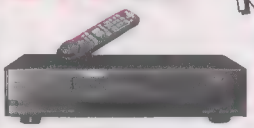

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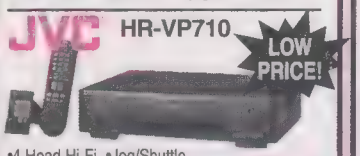

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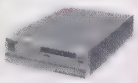

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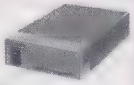

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cluding Jackson, Mississippi, since 1990. At the same time, Primestar launched a glitzy TV commercial (with special effects courtesy Industrial Light and Magic) to sell the nation on its brand of DBS. It was the first salvo in what Primestar says will be a $55 million advertising campaign. Even the competition likes the spot's glowing technological vision and the satellite awareness it's building. "They should spend $150 million educating the public," enthuses Stanley Hubbard.

But the DSS camp is less appreciative of a bit of psychological warfare by Primestar—it's trashing of the competition in newspaper advertisements in Jackson, site of the first DSS sales, and Indianapolis, RCA's home base; and in the pages of *USA Today*, where Primestar was touted as "DBS without the BS."

RCA executive vice president Joe Clayton characterizes the Primestar strategy as a "disinformation campaign" meant to discredit DSS by ignoring innovative aspects of the system—like it's unique ability to receive signals from several satellites without making viewers move their dishes, its user-friendly interfaces, and its application—a first—of MPEG-2 compression, which Clayton says guarantees "instant" readiness for widescreen, HDTV and two-way services. DirecTv's Linda Brill bristles that Primestar "is not by FCC definition a DBS service and should not be calling itself one." Counters Cusick, "I'm not going to play lexicon games."

CABLE CONNECTION

USSB's Stanley Hubbard calls Primestar "a distraction put forth by the cable industry to maintain its market position. If you want that service, you'll have to call the local cable company. And if you're within their area of service, they're going to try hard to switch you to sign you up as a cable customer, because that equipment is less expensive to install and maintain."

"At present, we have only one customer who's passed by cable," acknowledges Stephanie Outts, operations manager for TimeWarner Primestar of Jackson. "But if someone wants the dish, that's what we'll give 'em. We're not here to argue."

Cornelius "Con" Maloney, senior partner of the Cowboy Maloney's Electric City retail chain that sold Martin the first DSS dish, thinks the Primestar strategy of marketing through cable companies "is already backfiring." Why? Because people come into the store to see the new digital satellite system they've seen advertised on TV and "the only one we have is DSS," explains Maloney.

But Maloney's hardly complaining. "DSS is the biggest development we've seen since the camcorder, except this product is taking off right away," Maloney adds. "We knew there was pent-up demand for an alternative to cable and the C-Band systems. But the DSS sales we've seen have been double our wildest dreams."

With RCA's factory ratcheted up to churn out 5,000 DSS Systems a day, Thomson hyper-salesman Joe Clayton says he expects to sell 400,000 to 600,000 dishes by Christmas. Sony, which is poised to jump into the market after the first million are sold, is quietly readying its own DSS components for a June, 1995 introduction. A third supplier, thought to be either Toshiba or a Korean brand, is warming up in the bullpen for an intro six months after Sony.

Either way, the small dish is poised to leave a very big footprint. ■

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How To Choose Your Channels

What's playing? Plenty, and in plenty of combinations. Here's a rundown of how program packages for the three direct-to-home satellite services compare:

DIRECTV PROGRAMS FOR DSS

The minimal Direct Ticket access service costs $5.98 per month and maintains your pay-per-view account even if you purchase no other program packages. A movie preview channel and the Bloomberg Direct financial channel are left unlocked and, like the more lavish DirecTv services, you're kicked back a $2.50 movie discount coupon each month.

The Personal Choice package offers 30 channels for $21.95. All subscribers get ESPN, the Cartoon and USA Networks, CNN, Trio (a new family oriented drama, arts and journalism service from Canada), Headline News, the Discovery Channel, C-Span, TNT, Superstation TBS, the Nashville Network, Turner Classic Movies, Bloomberg Direct and MuchMusic (eight hours of daily Canadian pop service, repeated twice). Thrown in as a bonus are the Disney Channel and Music Choice (formerly Digital Cable Radio), which consists of 30 high-quality, commercial-free, genre music stations.

Personal Choice subscribers get to pick 10 more channels from a list that includes the Weather Channel, Newsworld International, E! Entertainment Television, the Sci-Fi Channel, Court TV, the Family and Travel Channels, C-Span2, CNN International, the Learning Channel, A&E, CNBC and Country Music Television. Or subscribers can instead top off the lineup with the Encore movie multiplex, which includes Encore, Encore Love Stories, Encore Westerns, Encore Mystery, Encore Tweens, Encore Action and Encore True Stories and Drama.

DirecTv Total Choice, more than 40 channels in all, delivers all the above for $29.95. Subscribers can also choose, a la carte, Playboy TV for $9.95 a month, PrimeTime 24 (where available) for $3.95, TV Asia for $5.95, the Physicians Television Network, and concerts and sporting events priced "competitively" with cable.

Coneheads on DSS

The Golf Channel launches next year, and Newsworld International (from the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.) is also coming soon. What's missing are Regional Sports Channels, American Movie Classics and Black Entertainment Television.

USSB PROGRAMS FOR DSS

The Essentials package, for $7.95, includes Lifetime, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon and Nick at Night, MTV, VH-1 and the All-News Channel. HBO, costs $10.95 and includes HBO East, HBO West, HBO 2 East and HBO 2 West. Multichannel Cinemax, which is also $10.95, includes Cinemax East, Cinemax West and Cinemax 2.

Showtime, priced at $10.95, includes Showtime East, Showtime West and Showtime 2, the Movie Channel East, the Movie Channel West and Flix ("the movies we grew up with," packaged by Showtime). USSB Showtime Plus, for $24.95, combines multiplexed Showtime, the Movie Channel, Flix and the Essentials packages.

USSB HBO Plus, for $24.95, has multichannel HBO and Cinemax channels, plus Essentials. Moving up the ladder, USSB Entertainment Plus, for $34.95, packages all the USSB programs, including Showtime Plus, HBO Plus and Essentials. Coming soon are free advertiser supported channel(s) from Hubbard Broadcasting. What's missing? An "all-letterboxed" movie channel.

continued on page 88

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BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH AND KENNETH KORMAN

OUT OF THE LOOP

It was the end of an institution—the last Summer Consumer Electronics Show. But SCES ended with a bang, not a whimper, because it served as the coming-out party for the hottest new category in consumer electronics: multimedia.

Of course, multimedia has been around for years, but it's only now emerging as a mainstream consumer business. CD-based multimedia machines like CD-i and 3DO, while they're not exactly leaping off store shelves, at least hint at what uses we might find for multimedia. And in the computer field, it's going gangbusters—more than six million CD-ROM players will be installed in homes and offices by the end of the year.

Next year's show will be called CES Interactive, and will take place in the spring in Philadelphia. But with few major video manufacturers present, multimedia and video games completely stole the show this summer at Chicago's McCormick Place convention center.

That's not to say there was nothing for video and audio buffs—the high-end exhibit in the Chicago Hilton continued to delight showgoers with the latest in music and movie sound systems, and a few impressive video demonstrations gave us a peek at the future.

MULTIMEDIA

From one end of McCormick Place to the other and all around the Windy City, flashing monitors and outrageous sound effects heralded the start of a new era in multimedia entertainment. Sega erected a huge display at a local hotel intended to showcase its new $150 32X hardware upgrade for the Sega Genesis. A preview of the *Virtua Racing Deluxe* 32X cartridge wowed crowds of industry insiders—the graphics looked every bit as good as those of the competing 3DO system. The complete Sega Saturn 32-bit system will debut next year.

Nintendo devoted much of its floorspace to previewing this fall's *Donkey Kong Country*, a Super NES title made with the latest software-design technology. It delivers the most realistic graphics and motion ever seen on a 16-bit system. The company also unveiled Super Game Boy, an adapter that runs Game Boy cartridges on a Super NES console and displays them in full color on a TV screen. And finally announced was Ultra 64, the official name for Nintendo's forthcoming 64-bit system, previously known only under its code name, Project Reality. The high-powered, cartridge-based Ultra 64 system will arrive here next fall.

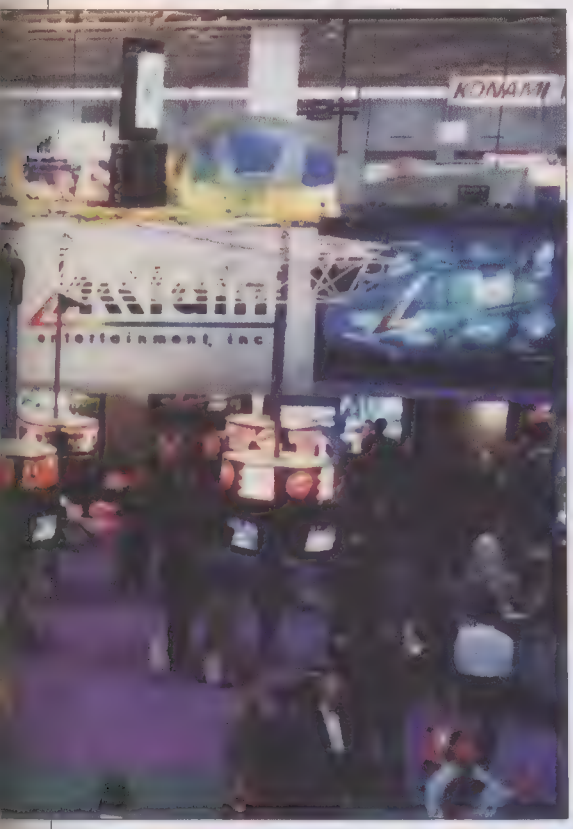
Philips showed the two low-priced, top-loading CD-i players we previewed

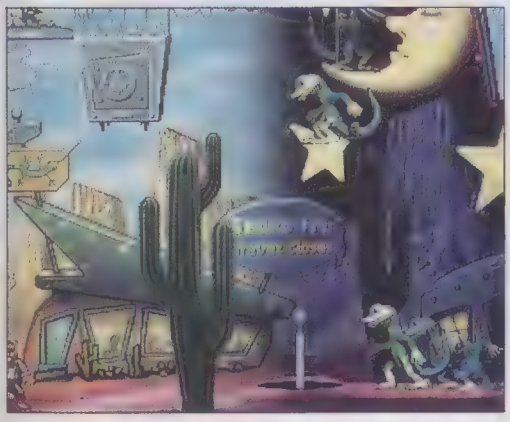
The Last Round-Up: Although this CES was the last in Chicago, there was no shortage of interesting hardware and software. Clockwise from upper left, the videogame/multimedia section, Meridian's new home theater electronics, a Zenith TV showing the StarSight program guide, and screens from Crystal Dynamics' *Gex* and Nintendo's *Donkey Kong Country*.

Multimedia and videogames dominate the floor as the Consumer Electronics Show departs Chicago's famous Loop.

in last month's "Multimedia Playground," and announced plans for CD-i hardware to arrive in '95: a TV/CD-i combination unit, a seven-disc CD-i changer, complete A/V rack systems incorporating CD-i players, and computer boards to make PCs and Macintoshes CD-i-compatible. A wide range of new CD-i software titles was previewed, including the arcade-style fighting game *Mutant Rampage* and a children's disc, *Flintstones/Jetsons Time Warp*. Philips also confirmed that many of its most popular CD-i titles would soon be available as PC and Macintosh CD-ROMs.

The 3DO game system had a somewhat diminished presence at CES, though working prototypes of 3DO players from GoldStar and Sanyo buoyed the fledgling format. Third-party software developers crowded the 3DO booth to





show off their new titles. Among the best were two discs from Crystal Dynamics: *Gex*, a role-playing adventure game starring a rambunctious gecko, and *Off-World Interceptor*, a 4x4 simulator that was highly addictive even in an early, unfinished version. Universal Interactive Studios previewed the unabashedly gory *Way of the Warrior*, and IntelliPlay and ESPN showed new *Let's Play Baseball* and *Let's Play Tennis* instructional discs, hosted by Ozzie Smith and Tracy Austin, respectively.

Atari used CES as the official launch of its Jaguar cartridge-based videogame system, which has been marketed on a limited basis since Christmas. The system is the only one currently available with 64-bit graphics; Atari hopes to capitalize on its head start by offering graphics superior to those on Sega and Super NES, but at a comparable (or lower) price. The company says 130 game developers are working on Jaguar titles, and that between 30 and 50 games will be out by Christmas, including *Doom*, a popular PC game. A Jaguar-compatible CD drive will land on shelves in October, and Sigma Designs will be adding chips to some of its ReelMagic boards, so that computers with CD-ROM drives and ReelMagic boards can play Jaguar CD games.

The show was packed with CD-ROM developers of all shapes and sizes, but most shared an interest in bridging the gap between familiar forms of entertainment and interactive multimedia.

"It's an even better trip on CD-ROM," says Time Warner Interactive about its *Woodstock: 25th Anniversary* disc, which features rare footage of the festival and a "mystical paintbrush for psychedelic creativity." Take 2 Interactive Software previewed *Hell: A Cyberpunk Thriller*, which boasts digitized renderings of Dennis Hopper and Grace Jones, along with their real voices. Steven Spielberg is codesigning LucasArts' outer-space adventure *The Dig*; Industrial Light & Magic is generating the special effects. And in an industry first, Sony Imagesoft will release a multi-platform game based on Francis Ford Coppola's new film production—*Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (directed by Ken-

Hot Stuff From The Hilton: The high-end exhibit at the Chicago Hilton displayed Marantz's new VCR (above) and a home theater system from Vidikron, Martin-Logan and EAD (below).

Busting TV's Ghosts

Each year, just before or just after the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, engineers exchange ideas at the International Conference on Consumer Electronics. Typically, few products are shown in their finished form. This year there was one major exception—Philips demonstrated a ghost canceller soon to be marketed under the Magnavox brand. It uses the same Philips system recently endorsed by the Federal Communications Commission. Some TV stations already broadcast the pilot tone used as a reference in the cancelling process.

The system works by measuring the strength of pre- and post-echoes (ghosts) of the pilot tone, and adding reversed echoes of the whole signal at the right time and intensity to cancel the echoes. There are also stand-alone boxes in the $4,000 range that are used by some cable companies to clean up signals before they are put on the cable system.

Eventually, ghost cancellers will be built right into TV sets. But within a year the Magnavox set-top ghost canceller, and possibly one with the Philips brand, will be available to help the millions of sets already in use. The box will use many integrated circuits, including a Mitsubishi ghost canceller IC and Zoran ghost canceller filter and controller ICs. The box will be available early next year and will probably cost about $200.

—Lancelot Braithwaite

Prototype Magnavox ghost-canceller

neth Branagh)—on the same day the movie opens in November.

Probably the most telling presence at CES was the Walt Disney Company. In a series of elaborate press parties and conferences, the company announced plans for games based on *The Lion King*, *The Jungle Book* and Mickey Mouse. The beaming presence of Roy Disney himself on the show floor left little doubt: Hollywood has indeed gone interactive.

From a picture-quality standpoint, Sigma Designs' ReelMagic PC video boards kicked the butts of most of the other multimedia devices. The boards let you play CD-ROMs that use MPEG video compression. Sigma Designs says 50 titles are available to play on ReelMagic, and many more are on the way. The basic ReelMagic Lite board lists for $349; a ReelMagic with an integral 16-bit sound processor costs $449.

Hewlett-Packard demoed a fascinating new multimedia computer that's an almost-all-in-one home electronics system. In addition to running the usual Windows applications, the computer incorporates a fax/modem, a digital telephone answering machine, an FM radio, a TV tuner/NTSC input board and a CD-ROM drive. All are driven by graphic interfaces that mimic the look and feel of the devices they replace.

VIDEO

Thomson Consumer Electronics dominated the main floor of McCormick with a booth showing RCA, GE and ProScan products, and highlighting DSS small-dish satellite hardware (see "Dawn of the Small Dish," this issue). Besides DSS, the company's most exciting products were its first reduced-curvature direct-view TVs—three 27-inch ProScans. The tubes use dark faceplates for better contrast, and INVAR shadow masks to reduce discoloration at high brightness settings. There's also a new slim-profile ProScan rear-projection set, the PS52650.

The Thomson booth also held two surprises. First was an RCA clone of JVC's SystemMax LCD monitor camcorder (see last month's "New Products"). Second, RCA showed a stylish new home entertainment system: an equipment rack packed with RCA audio and video electronics, an RCA TV, and RCA speakers and subwoofer. RCA isn't the first name we think of in speakers, but these hold promise—they use high-quality drivers, including ■ Tonegin tweeter similar to that used in NHT's wonderful SuperZeros. Unfortunately, we couldn't hear them on the noisy show floor.

Samsung, the only other major video manufacturer at McCormick, showed its most distinctive camcorders to date. The SCX854 is a slim 8mm point-and-shoot with four auto exposure modes and an 8x zoom. The SCX904 is a shoe-style 8mm similar to Sony's FX-series camcorders, with auto exposure modes, a 12x zoom and a character titler.

In the Chicago Hilton, Marantz surprised the industry with three new video products: the MV-610 VHS hi-fi VCR, the LV-510 combi player (based on the Pioneer CLD-D503 chassis) and the LCD-410 pocket-size LCD TV. The VCR and combi player are intended for those who own Marantz audio gear and want a complete Marantz A/V system.

Proton was also in the Chicago Hilton, showing the final version of its long-awaited DT-3660, a 16:9, 34-inch direct-view set. The set crops images to both 16:9 and 17:9 (for wider aspect ratios), and offers the usual stretch mode for anamorphic material. Both cropping modes offer adjustable centering. The

continued on page 85

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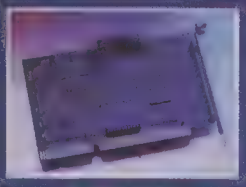

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TOYS 'R' ART

The Return Of Pixelvision

Pixel Perfect. The no-frills PXL-2000 shoots in black-and-white on audio tape.

How an offbeat, snapshot-simple camcorder is winning the hearts of video artists

BY STEWART APPLEGATH

"Film will only become art when the materials are as inexpensive as pencil and paper." —*Jean Cocteau*

Imagine a camcorder that can shoot beautiful images, that has no complicated controls, that produces shots that are always in focus—all for under $200. Ridiculous? This camcorder not only exists, but has been embraced by a group of low-budget videomakers who have received international recognition. There's even a video festival devoted to their work, and this October, for the first time, videos shot with this unusual camcorder will be displayed as a part of an annual video festival at New York's Lincoln Center. However, the most astounding thing about the camcorder isn't the price or its unusual status, but the way it records images. The camcorder shoots *black-and-white* video on 90-minute *audio cassettes*.

If you're wondering why you haven't heard of it before, it may be because you don't visit toy stores regularly—the PXL-2000 was designed for children. Fisher-Price manufactured the camcorder and sold it through Toys 'R' Us outlets starting in 1987. The bad news is Fisher-Price discontinued the PXL-2000 in 1989. I got mine for $75 in 1992, when Fisher-Price was still selling leftover inventory, but even that trickle has stopped.

Most camcorders pass quickly into obscurity as new technology is introduced. By contrast, the PXL-2000's reputation has improved with the passage of time. When audiences see the images created in what the camcorder's fans call "pixelvision," they're both fascinated and dismayed to learn that the camcorder that makes it possible is no longer available.

What's arresting about the PXL-2000 is the images it creates. The

CAMCORDER & INVENTOR: GENE COLEMAN

Against The Grain: Scenes from Sadie Benning's *It Wasn't Love* (top) and *Jollies* display the camcorder's pixelated image and black border.

black-and-white image is composed of a small fraction of the pixels seen on an average Hi8 recording. The result is an image that's "pixelated"—decidedly grainier than usual—and unlike any home video you've ever seen. Moreover, the live image area is framed by a dark gray mat. The unique qualities of this image and the camcorder's simple setup demand a different approach to videomaking. Most people shooting with it accept these qualities as *jumping-off points* rather than limitations.

While one might dismiss the PXL-2000's images as crude, they can also be understood as simple and direct impressions, less mediated by the imperatives of technology. Having used the PXL-2000 in my own video work, I've found that its images express a more raw and personal voice, especially when compared with conventional 8mm or VHS footage. You almost immediately sense the PXL-2000 can be used more freely, allowing you to concentrate on what's going on in front of, rather than on, the camcorder. To some extent, it lightens the burden of creating The Perfect Recording. As a result, it can lead one in unanticipated directions, making the videomaking process more engaging and challenging.

As the big electronics companies move toward simpler point-and-shoot setups, it's easy to forget that the PXL-2000 was there some time ago. You could have purchased one from Fisher-Price for between $159 and $189, and it's as easy to use as a Close'n Play phonograph. When PXL-2000 owners encountered problems, more often than not, Fisher-Price sent out replacement units rather than bother with repairs. There are no complicated controls, no menus to choose from and no shooting rules to worry about. If only for a brief while, this affordable "people's camera" brought Cocteau's prophecy within reach.

HOW IT WORKS

The PXL-2000 is an exercise in sophisticated simplicity. Created with kids in mind, its technology and performance are quite advanced, although offered in a low-tech, simple-to-use package. It features a fixed focus lens, automatic exposure adjustment and a built-in microphone with an auto-record level. It records video on chromium-dioxide audio tape, although a 90-minute tape lasts only 11 minutes when recording video. It has a simple playback mechanism and can be hooked up to a VCR or a TV.

I find it makes sense to copy all or parts of audio tapes made with the camcorder to Hi8, and to reuse the audio cassettes. With a minimum of bother, it's also possible to shoot directly onto VHS tapes in your VCR. Pixel artist Michael O'Reilly, who also teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia, told me how he attached the guts of a PXL-2000 to his Hi8 camcorder and now records directly to Hi8, avoiding generation loss and the digital artifacts that sometimes appear on the video images recorded on audio tape. Though such setups start to take the PXL-2000 out of Pure-and-Simple territory, they are among the

Mr. PXL: PXL-2000 inventor James Wickstead with prototype for a new model.

creative shooting options devised by adventurous pixellators.

A CCD technology modification allows low-cost picture processing and recording using a fixed head instead of the rotating head found in regular camcorders. A fixed head is less complicated and less expensive to make. The automatic exposure adjustment combined with a neutral-density filter, activated by a simple manual twist, allows the PXL-2000 camcorder to shoot in almost any circumstance, though it loses quality in low light.

Aside from its beautiful pixelated images, the fixed-focus lens is the camcorder's dominant feature. No zoom or focus to worry about. Some might consider these shortcomings, but I see them as *strengths*. However, the viewfinder is very basic. It doesn't display what the lens sees and it distorts the area you're looking at. As a result, it wasn't long before I found myself using the lens as an extension of my arm, and not looking through the viewfinder at all. In this way, I can move in close and explore in ways I wouldn't consider with most traditional camcorders, with their searching focus mechanisms. A quarter-inch away is not too near and the close-ups are spectacular.

RISE AND FALL

I spoke with PXL-2000 inventor James Wickstead, founder of Wickstead Design Associates in Cedar Knolls, New Jersey, to find out why the camcorder was discontinued and whether rumors concerning its resurrection—in black-and-white and color versions—are true. I had half-believed its demise was part of a conspiracy to keep this great low-cost competitor out of the picture. It turns out the decision to discontinue it was more about corporate judgments and the rising value of the yen.

Back in the '80s, when Wickstead got together with Fisher-Price and approached Sony with the idea for a pixel-style camcorder, Sony, according to Wickstead, said it couldn't be done. But the PXL-2000 sold well once it was priced and marketed properly. Fisher-Price, however, says it never sold well to the people it was designed to appeal to, and that the price had to be lowered to $99 to move the camcorders off the shelves. Wickstead believes that Fisher-Price's support of the PXL-2000 was alf-hearted, and that a promised national marketing campaign failed to materialize.

The PXL-2000 was manufactured by Sanyo in Japan at a time when the yen

continued on page 90

Pixel Artists Make Their Mark

Although the PXL-2000 was aimed at young children, it was an adolescent who brought the camcorder to a wider public. When she was just 15, Sadie Benning's filmmaker father gave her one for Christmas. She used it to earn a place, at 19, as the youngest artist ever included in the prestigous Whitney Biennial exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, and to explore her emerging lesbian identity. In addition, her PXL-2000 tapes *Jollies* and *A Place Called Lovely* were part of a retrospective of her work at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Most of Benning's tapes are set in her suburban Milwaukee bedroom, where she engages the viewer with direct and confessional expressions of teen-aged angst. Treating the camcorder as a captive audience, Benning presents herself, according to film critic J. Hoberman in *Premiere*, "as a fragmented being of eyes and lips, developing a persona at once tough and vulnerable, provocative and mischievous."

Wired: Close-up from Michael O'Reilly's award-winning *Glass Jaw*.

Michael O'Reilly, another PXL-visionary, has received recognition for *Glass Jaw*, a video in which he recounts the history of a bike injury compounded by a mugging and brain surgery. *Glass Jaw* won the Grand Prize in Sony's 1993 Visions of the U.S. video competition, as well as several other festival awards. O'Reilly's densely layered images and disturbing, haunting narrative are unforgettable. O'Reilly says he is "continually amazed by what this little camera can do." He recently premiered a new video, *Orion Climbs*, using computer-processed PXL footage. "It's an immense disappointment when my students find out the camera is no longer readily available." —**SA**

•

Benning's and O'Reilly's tapes are available from the Video Data Bank in Chicago; phone, 312-345-3550. The New York Video Festival runs from Sept. 30—Oct. 8 at the Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center; 212-875-5600 for more info. For more about the PXL THIS festival, send an SASE to Gerry Fialka, 2427-1/2 Glyndon Ave., Venice CA 90291; phone, 310-306-7330.

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BY COREY GREENBERG

WIRE STRAITS

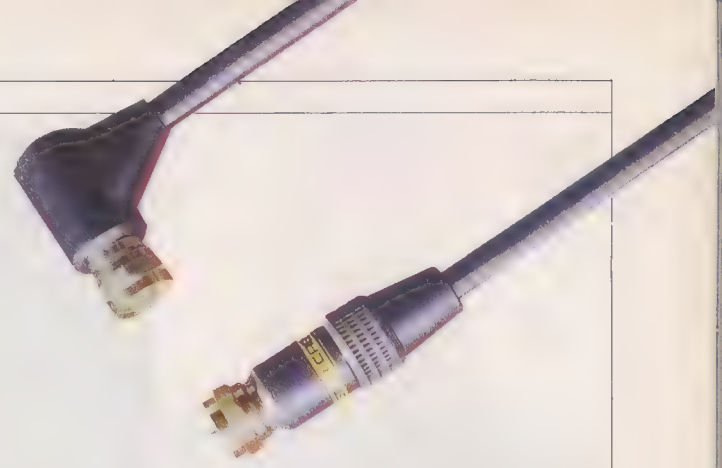
Do quality video and audio cables really *make a difference?*

Braided Glory: Kimber Kable's braided speaker cables are popular with audiophiles. Its braided interconnect cables are also popular, but they're impractical in areas with heavy RF interference.

We've all heard the ol' chestnut, "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link," but what's an ol' chestnut doing spouting off about chains and links? *Plenty!* Fact is, the ol' chestnut knows a thing or two about home theater, and he knows that you can rope together the best audio/video components on the market and *still* not get all the performance they're capable of unless you link them with cables of comparable quality. You wouldn't put Wal-Mart tires on a Ferrari, would you? How 'bout generic mustard on a Nathan's hot dog? If you're serious about the audio/video gear you buy, you need to chuck those cheap generic cables that came in the box and get your system some high-quality wire.

"What's wrong with the cables that came with my receiver, smart boy?"

Good question! There's nothing particularly "wrong" with the 25-cent cables that are packed in with most VCRs, A/V receivers, laserdisc players and the like. And yes, you read that correctly—these molded-plastic cables cost the manufacturer less than a *quarter* to add in. If you hook your home theater rig up with these throwaway cables, you *will* hear sound and you *will* see a picture—but there's a big difference between something that works and something that works well. A coat hanger works as a car radio antenna, but you'll pull in more stations and get better sound quality if you use a properly designed antenna. *That's* the difference between the throwaway cables that came with your gear and high-quality audio/video cables. These things aren't an accessory—



Sure Thing: High-quality video cables like these from Monster Cable come with sturdy, dependable connectors.

they're a *neccessory*.

While I definitely advocate the use of high-quality video cables, it's been my experience that audio cables show larger and more obvious differences. Cables *do* sound different from one another. While this may seem a radical notion, it really isn't when you consider that all cables measure differently in terms of their electrical properties.

And just as speakers and amplifiers that measure differently sound different from one another, so do cables. But beware: Mediocre audio and video gear will not be turned into graceful hi-def swans merely by throwing some good cable at it any more than a satin G-string and a splash of Hai Karate turns me into one of them Chippendale's dancers. But if you've got good equipment and you make the switch from cheap cables, the improvements can be shocking.

In a good system, high-quality audio cable will give the sound more clarity and definition, with less of the gritty, muffled character common to cheap throwaway cables. Until you get a chance to hear a truly high-end audio system, you might assume that all reproduced sound has a canned, metallic character. High-quality audio cables can virtually banish this coarseness, replacing it with a far more lifelike and natural sound quality. Using high-quality speaker cables will result in cleaner highs, more lifelike voices and musical textures, and far more powerful and defined bass. High-quality video cables give a clearer and more detailed picture.

Even aside from audible and visual improvements, high-quality cables also help prevent the kinds of intermittent problems that can drive a good man to drink. Ever see video noise on your TV that only goes away when you fiddle with the video cables? My dad's system acquired this problem and it drove him nuts when the picture would go south in the middle of a Cowboys game—he'd spring out of his La-Z-Boy like a crazed mongoose, cursing a blue streak and moving the nest o' video cables behind the TV back and forth until he'd find the Magic Position which temporarily cured the video noise, at least until his butt touched back down on the La-Z-Boy again and Round 2 of "My Dad Vs. Cheap Video Cables: The Disturbia in Suburbia" was underway.

Why does cheap video cable do this? Because the cable connectors are poorly manufactured and flimsy, so they don't make very clean or tight connections. Cheap video cables also have poor electrical shielding, which lets in noise and interference that cause the kinds of problems that cause fathers to jump out of La-Z-Boys and curse like sailors.

These kinds of problems affect cheap throwaway *audio* cables too, the result being all kinds of buzzes and hums that persist no matter what you do. A lot of my friends ask me to take a look at their faulty hi-fi systems—"My left channel's dead!" "All's I'm getting is a buzzing sound out of the speakers!"—and nine times out of 10 the only thing wrong in the system is a cheap cable that finally went belly-up from repeated plug-in/plug-out action or from being stepped on once too often. (The 10th time is usually a displeased god, which calls for sacrificing a goat and painting the rumpus room walls with its blood.)

The solution, of course, is to replace the poor stuff with the good stuff. High-quality cable comes with sturdy, long-life connectors which are expertly hand-soldered to the cable itself, ensuring a positive and long-lasting connection. These cables also feature thick protective jackets that resist the kinds of nicks and cuts that can sever the thin plastic sleeves of cheap throwaway cables. It's this level of reliability and durablity that makes high-quality cable a necessary tool of audio and video professionals.

Good cables employ better raw materials, too—instead of low-grade conductors and cheap PVC insulation, you get high-conductivity copper and silver conductors for better signal integrity, and high-tech plastic insulation materials like Teflon and polyethylene that keep the cable's electrical integrity stable while resisting damage from outside abuse.

REVENGE OF THE CABLE NERD

Okay, here's the obligatory techno-weenie section where I explain some of the electrical properties of cables and why they're important. If you get queasy at the thought of post-collegiate education and want to skip this part of the article, I understand, but don't blame me when some Nordic-looking babe in a bar comes up to you and asks with a heavy accent how much

Cable Code: Monster's THX cables are color-coded for all six channels of a home theater sound system.

capacitance Kimber cable has—you're on your own, flyboy.

All cables have three basic electrical properties: resistance, capacitance and inductance. It's the unique balance of these three properties that largely determines how a cable will perform in a given system. Other factors, like conductor material and purity, and the quality of the wire's insulation (also known as the "dielectric"), can also contribute to a cable's performance to greater or lesser degrees.

Resistance is the tendency of wire to lose a portion of the electrical signal, turning it into heat—if the wire has too much resistance and the signal is large enough, the wire actually heats up, which is the principle behind the heating elements in toasters and hair dryers. This heat represents *loss*, however, and in an audio/video cable, we don't want *any* of the signal to be converted to heat. So very low resistance is a desirable thing when we're talking about audio/video cables, especially speaker cables, which have to deal with much higher signal levels than line-level audio interconnects and video cables. High resistance in a speaker cable equals less amplifier power delivered to the speakers, so it's always a good idea to use the thickest speaker cable with the lowest resistance you can can get away with without your spouse yawling about "all these @#&$% *garden hoses* running all over my living room!"

From the standpoint of cables, inductance can be defined as resistance to current flow, while capacitance is the ability to store energy. The best-sounding cables are designed to minimize these effects as much as possible. All things being equal, a cable with high inductance will sound noticeably duller in the highs, while a cable with high capacitance will present a tougher load than the audio outputs on most laserdisc players, VCRs and surround processors can drive without distortion. Rest assured, Dear Reader, that all of the recommended cables in this article have low capacitance, resistance and inductance for the best possible audio and video performance in a home theater system.

Quest For Perfection: Audioquest's Type 4 speaker cable is ideal for budget-conscious audio/videophiles.

Perfect For Processors: Monster's THX interconnects

CURMUDGEON ALERT

If you haven't been following the Cable Wars in the mainstream hi-fi mags these past few years, I should tell you that there are some "experts," mainly of the old and crusty persuasion, who rail against the notion of audible and visual differences between cables. Basically, these people are anti-quality, and frugal to the point of turning their Jockeys inside out to get in another day's use. They'll call you a money-wasting fool for buying Cutty Sark instead of Ol' Rotgut, for buying a Mercedes instead of a Hyundai, or for buying Ben & Jerry's ice cream instead of the cheapest generic in your grocer's freezer.

They don't want *you* to have any fun because *they* don't have any fun. Follow their lead, and you'll find yourself sitting in a trailer park surrounded by your fellow "I-know-better" curmudgeons, drunk on Ol' Rotgut with generic ice cream running down the front of your days-old undershirt, watching a cheap 13-inch TV with a coat-hanger antenna and wondering whatever happened to that *fine* woman who left you for your best friend—the one who installed high-quality cables in his home theater.

RECOMMENDED CABLES

As an ex-broadcast engineer, I've evaluated more cable than any sane man should. I've used all of the cables listed below, and recommend them all for their performance and value.

- *Video.* By far the best standard video cable I've tried is Canare's 75-ohm video cable, available mail-order from HAVE Inc. (508-828-2000) or at your local pro audio/video dealer. The Canare is a super-flexible, ultra-precision video and digital data cable, made from premium materials and terminated by HAVE with Canare's own gold-plated 75-ohm RCA plugs for low reflected signal distortion, or VSWR.

VSWR stands for Voltage Standing Wave Ratio, which refers to the effect that occurs when impedance mismatches between video gear and the cable that conects them cause a portion of the signal to reflect backwards against the direction of the signal flow, creating multiple reflections that can degrade the transmission.

Hot Wires: Monster's THX speaker cables

Best of all's the price: a one-meter cable is only $40, and longer cables are only slightly more expensive. The same cable and connectors are also available from Michael Percy, a mail-order audio/video parts dealer (415-669-7181). He charges 75 cents a foot for the cable, $12 each for installed connectors.

I have not seen better picture quality

Plugs A'Plenty: A selection of Audioquest interconnects, including Turquoise at far left.

when using S-video cables than when using good quality 75-ohm cable like the Canare. *Video Magazine* senior editor Brent Butterworth sez that's because the Y/C separator in my Pioneer Pro-76 TV is good enough that using an S-video cable won't offer improvement over 75-ohm cable. You have to try both types in your own system to see which works better. To test for this, scrounge up a tape or laserdisc with color bars, and see which cable produces the least dot crawl—it appears most noticeably between the green and purple bars.

If you do want to go with S-video cables, I suggest you get something that's built to last—Straightwire's Video-S ($19, $25 and $39 for lengths of 6, 10 and 25 feet) is a solid recommendation and light-years ahead of what came with your laserdisc player.

• *Audio Interconnect.* My picks for high-quality home theater cables include Straightwire's Harmony and Musicable interconnects at $19.95/meter/pair and $29/meter/pair, respectively, and Audioquest's Turquoise interconnect at $30/meter/pair and $60/six-meter/pair. All of these interconnects are high-end, audiophile-grade cables, and any one of them will be a huge step up from cheap throwaway wire.

Monster Cable has recently introduced the first high-grade cables to be certified for Home THX systems. The THX approval has little to do with sound quality—it mostly concerns the use of sturdy connectors and color-coding, which makes it easier to keep track of where each cable's supposed to go. The Monster THX series has two interconnect models, both of which come with six individual signal cables joined side-by-side that can either be used as-is or separated into two runs of three cables each for left/center/right on one bundle and left surround/right surround/subwoofer on the other. Monster offers

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THE CABLE CONTROVERSY—A SECOND OPINION

BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

Because high-quality video cables are a fairly new type of product, the *Video Magazine* staff had never really experimented with cables. To settle the cable issue once and for all in our minds, technical editor Lancelot Braithwaite and I compared several video and audio cables, from the generic types that come with VCRs to exotic high-end designs.

We connected the video cables between a Pioneer LD-S2 laserdisc player and a Toshiba 32-inch TV. Instead of using multiple inputs on the TV, we swapped the cables, using the same input. (Experimentation showed us that the difference between two inputs on a TV can be greater than the difference between cables.) Both of us were aware of the cables' identities.

In S-video, we compared Audioquest's Video SZ ($130 for two meters), XLO's $70 ER-1S and a generic cable. The differences were subtle—barely noticeable changes in color intensity, brightness, noise and detail. Our preferences varied from disc to disc but, overall, we slightly preferred the Audioquest cable. It also has the sturdiest S-video connectors we've seen (we've been using the cable extensively for a year without problems).

If you're an editing enthusiast who disconnects and reconnects often, if you need a long run of S-video cable (usually a bad idea, anyway) or if you're a truly hard-core videophile, the Audioquest makes sense. Otherwise, we'll stick with the generic stuff.

For composite cables, we tried XLO's $42 ER-2, Canare's LV-61S (about 75 cents a foot, which I terminated with generic, $2/pair all-metal RCA plugs) and two generic cables. Again, the differences were slight, and varied with the program material. There was no clear winner; perhaps we *very* slightly preferred the Canare. However, we *measured* a big difference. The needle on Lance's Shiba-Soku noise meter was unstable with the generic cables, indicating poor shielding, which admits radio-frequency interference (RFI). We think it makes sense to spend $30 or $40 on a good composite cable—you get better RFI rejection, and sturdier plugs and cable to boot.

To evaluate audio cables, we used a high-end system with B&W's $3,300 803 speakers and $13,000 worth of Cello electronics, and a real-world system with affordable Rotel and AMC electronics and $600 Mirage M290 speakers. With either system, differences were clearly audible, but the personalities of the cables varied with the systems we tried.

XLO's Type 1 interconnect

Some insist that double-blind A/B/X tests prove all cables sound the same, but such tests also "prove" all amps sound the same, when anyone with an open mind and listening experience knows better. We use instead what I call "relaxed A/B testing"—we use the program material of the testing subject's choice, and switch the device under test at the end of a musical selection, instead of rapidly switching back and forth. This helps eliminate the stress of typical A/B and A/B/X tests. All devices under test see the same signal path you'd use at home—there's no complex switching box that can degrade perfor-

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TAPES & DISCS

NEW RELEASES

Losing Your Sanity Clause: Things go a little crazy when Jack Skellington and Oogie's Boys kidnap Kris Kringle in *The Nightmare Before Christmas.*

FEATURE FILMS

The Nightmare Before Christmas

1993. Anim. Dir. Henry Selick. Surround, cc. (PG) 76 min. $19.99. LD $29.99. Collector's LD $99.98. Touchstone.

Dazzling and dense, Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is both a rich reworking of tradition and a brand-new trip. Devised (though not directed) by Tim Burton, this haunting tale of intrigue in the land where holidays dwell employs sophisticated stop-motion animation to create a fascinating world—the ghoulish figures that inhabit the impressionistic landscapes suggest chemically induced hallucinations. Though echoes of everything from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to Charles Addams and the Muppets add a tantalizing resonance, the story has an eerily sweet quality all its own.

The Toast of Halloween Town, Jack Skellington has tired of leading the village's annual pumpkin festivities. Discovering Christmas, he resolves to assume Santa's duties, and hires a trio of Munchkin-sized thugs called Oogie's Boys to kidnap the old man and imprison him during Christmas eve. For all his enthusiasm, however, Jack fails to grasp the essence of Yuletime, and his attempt to deliver toys nearly ends in disaster. Only the intervention of his secret admirer Sally, a Frankenstein monster-like creation of an evil scientist, restores the holidays to their natural order.

Younger children may find the story confusing, or be frightened by the dark imagery, but everyone else is in for a treat. Danny Elfman's typically exotic score enhances the funhouse mood; he also supplies Jack's singing voice, adding a note of high drama. Above all, *Nightmare* offers a sumptuous visual feast. While the story doesn't achieve the mythic eloquence Burton and crew intended, the hijinks of these strangely animated characters provide a thrill that lasts through repeated viewings.

—Jon Young

Farewell My Concubine

1993. Gong Li, Leslie Cheung, Zhang Fengyi; dir. Chen Kaige. Surround, subtitled. (R) 157 min. priced for rental. Miramax.

Foreign films with great pedigrees—best film at Cannes, in this case—can be intimidating. Recommend a two-and-a-half-hour Chinese film with subtitles, that follows the lives of two male opera stars against the sweep of China's turbulent political past, and watch reluctant eyeballs roll. So let's put it this way: *Farewell My Concubine* is a great flick, at once a large-scale historical epic, a backstage soap opera and an "art film." Its beauty—beyond striking cinematography that makes many frames seem like painterly tableaux—is that these elements balance so skillfully you never notice the gears shift.

On the theatrical screen, it was easy to be swept away by the film's visual scale. On video, the personal moments shine, thanks to a superb ensemble. Leslie Cheung as Dieyi, forced into female roles at the sacrifice of his sexual identity, and Gong Li as Juxian, the prostitute

The Long Goodbye: *Farewell My Concubine.*

who marries the manly but spineless Xiaolou, stand out. Juxian is a beautiful cipher, walking the edge between dragon lady and sharp, pragmatic woman. In his whiteface makeup, enormously talented yet tragic, obsessed by art and conflicted love, Dieyi is the Michael Jackson of the opera world.

This Western viewer, admittedly ignorant of Chinese history, can only imagine the deeper layers of meaning—involving art and politics, romance and revolution—that exist beneath *Concubine*'s thoroughly absorbing surface.

—Marianne Meyer

The Snapper

1993. Colm Meany, Tina Kellegher; dir. Stephen Frears. Stereo, cc. (R) 95 min. priced for rental. Miramax.

After the clumsy, unrealistic treatment of single motherhood in *Angie*, the frank, down-to-earth wit of *The Snapper* comes as a refreshing change. Revisiting the raucous Irish Catholic world of *The Commitments*, screenwriter Roddy Doyle paints a vivid portrait of Sharon Curley (Kellegher), the oldest of six kids, who becomes pregnant after a late-night encounter on the hood of a car. Refusing to tell her startled parents that the father is a boring, middle-aged neighbor, she continues to hang out with her girlfriends at the pub while the rest of the family comes to grips with her condition.

With an offhand tone that suggests a cinema verite documentary, this easygoing comedy draws humor not from jokes, but from ordinary people muddling through. Kellegher displays restraint and sensitivity as Sharon, a decent, none-too-sharp woman who confronts her fate without much reflrection. Doyle and director Stephen Frears don't romanticize the Curleys, showing the important of alcohol in their lives. It's shocking to see Sharon drinking heavily just weeks before the baby arrives.

The accents are so thick that *The Snapper* would benefit from subtitles. You may need to replay scenes where the dialog flies fast and furious. **—JY**

Threesome

1991. Stephen Baldwin, Lara Flynn Boyle; dir. Andrew Fleming. Surround, cc. (R) 93 min. priced for rental. Columbia TriStar.

One college dorm suite hosts three wildly disparate students: party animal Stuart (Baldin), withdrawn writer Eddy (Josh Charles) and the aspiring actress Alex (Boyle), assigned to the wrong side of the dorm because of her male-sounding name. Sexual tension is inevitable and immediate: Stuart lusts after Alex, who has a crush on Eddy, who describes himself as a "sexual ambivalent"—but only because he's afraid to admit the one he's really interested in is Stuart. The situation may be contrived, but the characterizations ring true in this Gen X *Jules and Jim*.

Not only is *Threesome* surprisingly sexy, it's sexy in surprising ways (you won't forget the scene in which Boyle tries to seduce Charles on top of a library desk). Writer/director Andrew Fleming's independant film explores all the possibilities offered by this trio with honesty and humor—Baldwin's motormouth obscenities are particularly hilarious. **—M. Faust**

Missing Link: Looking to make a *Threesome*

EDITOR'S CHOICE

by

kenneth korman

Nothing enhances a legend like an untimely death. The fact of a terrible accident can loom as large as the substance of an entire life and career—look at James Dean or Jim Morrison—and gradually transform a beloved public figure into a true cultural icon. The great tragedy of actor Brandon Lee, who was accidentally shot and killed while delivering his breakthrough performance in **The Crow** (Miramax; VHS priced for rental, laserdisc $39.99), is that he barely had enough time to hint at what might have been. Lee's charismatic presence is such a stunner, it surely would have made him a huge star—even if he'd lived.

Brandon Lee

Make no mistake: *The Crow* is not a great film. Based on the successful underground comic book of the same name, it emphasizes style over content almost to the point of neglecting plot altogether. Lee stars as Eric Draven, a working-class rock musician who is brutally mudered along with his fiance on the eve of their wedding. The crow, which legend describes as a spirit guide between the realms of the living and the dead, brings Draven back to exact his revenge on the band of thugs that destroyed his life. That's it—the story holds very few surprises.

Lee's performance, as well as the overall look and feel of the movie, fills the spaces left by the script and makes for a haunting, even memorable experience. Director Alex Proyas has won many awards for his music videos and commercials, and he lets the soundtrack—which features the latest gothic/industrial rock and has deservedly topped the charts—propel the movie. Proyas has obviously seen *Blade Runner* a few times, right down to *The Crow's* bleak yet panoramic cityscapes and rain-soaked rooftop finale. But that will only make the letterboxed and THX-approved laserdisc edition of *The Crow* even more of a treat. ■

Like Water for Chocolate

1993. Lumi Cavazos, Marco Leonardi, Regina Torne; dir. Alfonso Arau. Digital hi-fi stereo, subtitled. (NR) 115 min. VHS priced for rental. LD $39.99. Touchstone.

How did this highest grossing foreign film in 30 years get to the top? Being based upon a best-selling book doesn't hurt, especially if that book is based upon an intriguing "high concept" (how Hollywood!) that nonetheless leaves room for plot twists, warmth, humor, romance, sex (full frontal nudity, too!) and lots of food.

Born in a kitchen, on a farm in Mexico, young Tita is a cook of extraordinary charms. But when her mother refuses to let her marry the boy she loves (as youngest daughter, she is obligated to care for her widowed parent), she really puts herself into her meals. The story of a man who would marry his beloved's sister just to be near her, as Tita's lover does, is intriguing in itself. But Tita has the ability to communicate her emotions through her food and those who eat what she prepares are subject to incredible longing, lusts, regrets or release that echo her roiling spirit. In a family rife with such romantic intrigues, that makes for some rather heady meals.

The original novel was as much cookbook as plot, lingering on Tita's food preparation with mouth-watering detail. Translating such a book, with its poetic moments of magic surrealism, is a tricky dish, but director Arau makes the most of the opportunity, unafraid to try the literal—flames of desire, fireworks at consummation—and generally maintaining a delicate balance. Following the sprawl of the plot over many years requires much voice-over narration; many scenes are loaded with exposition that theaten to overwhelm the characters. Yet the talented cast refuses to succumb.

The film is a hearty, satisfying meal, but the book is the true feast.

—Marianne Meyer

Hard Boiled

1992. Chow Yun-Fat, Tony Leung; dir. John Woo. Mono, dubbed. (NR) 127 min. priced for rental. Fox Lorber.

Aside from his masterpiece *The Killer*, the Hong Kong films of action specialist John Woo have been slow to arrive in U.S. video stores. If you've only seen his American debut, the lackluster *Hard Target*, you may feel Woo has been overhyped. Not to worry: After viewing *Hard Boiled*, you'll never be able to look at a *Lethal Weapon* sequel again without sneering, "Wimps."

Chow Yun-Fat, Woo's regular star and one of Hong Kong's top box-office draws, returns as a cop on the trail of gun-runners. He steps up his investigation after his partner is killed, even though the trail leads to the Triads, gangsters who have infiltrated every aspect of Hong Kong society.

Hard Boiled was obviously intended as a calling card to Hollywood. While all the Woo trademarks are here—acrobatic violence, melodramatic male bonding, people who bleed like waterhoses run over by a lawn mower—they take a back seat to ostentatious pyrotechnics. The extended finale, set in a hospital where the mob has stored its arsenal, resembles nothing so much as a sketch for *Die Hard III*. Not that it's bad—in fact, much of it is astounding. But Woo (who appears in the film as Chow's retired mentor) was clearly trying to show that he could rein himself in for Hollywood.

It doesn't help that, unlike *The Killer*, Fox-Lorber is only releasing *Hard Boiled* in a video edition that has been panned-and-scanned and dubbed. *A Better Tomorrow*, the film that made Woo's reputation, has also just been released on cassette by Republic Home Video. Unavailable for review at presstime, it is also in dubbed format. **—MF**

The Big Schlepp: Fetching young maid gets the like water in *Like Water for Chocolate*, like.

LASERDISCS

She's Gotta Have It

1986. B&W/color. Tracy Camilla Johns, Tommy Redmond Hicks, John Canada Terrell, Spike Lee; dir. Lee. Digital mono. (NR) 88 min. plus supplement. LD letterboxed $49.95. Criterion.

Nola Darling, the beautiful, strong and independent central character referred to in the title, is first introduced to us in her natural habitat—her bed. She wakes and sits up—that's all you need to get an immediate sense of her physicality and sensuousness. This laserdisc will let you in on how this opening mood was achieved—by stealing a trick from *Raging Bull*—and plenty more.

Criterion's edition of *She's Gotta Have It* features a beautiful and uncensored print of Spike Lee's extraordinary first feature, which deals honestly and humorously with female sexuality and the assorted attitudes males take toward

Driving Ms. Crazy: L.A. clowns learn there are no *Short Cuts* in life.

it. The disc has analog-track commentary by Lee, sound designer Barry Brown and production supervisor Monty Ross, who tell you everything you need to know about making the film. But best of all are the comments of cinematographer Ernest Dickerson, who happily shares the techniques and language of his art. Bonuses include previously deleted scenes, outtakes, a still photo gallery with commentary by photographer David Lee, a rare music video and two of Lee's Air Jordan Nike ads.

This $22,000, shoot-without-permits film uses economy in everything but ideas and inventiveness. It opened the floodgates for black filmmakers and is the easiest Spike Lee film to take to heart with pure unqualified pleasure. Please baby, please baby, baby, baby please. **—Josef Krebs**

Short Cuts

1993. Andie MacDowell, Tim Robbins, Madeleine Stowe, Fred Ward, Lily Tomlin; dir. Robert Altman. Digital surround. (R) 188 min. plus supplement. 5 sides CLV/ 1 side CAV $124.95. Criterion/Voyager.

When I reviewed the unsatisfactory tape version of *Short Cuts* ("Tapes & Discs," July), I hoped the letterboxed disc would restore the thrilling experience I remembered from the theater. In Criterion's superset, it does. The 2.35:1 transfer lets the air and life back into Robert Altman's interlocking tales of life and death in the L.A. 'burbs, and the soundtrack, with its jazz score so critical to the film, is brilliantly reproduced. (The analog tracks carry the music alone.) Now that the interplay of characters and story lines can be seen clearly, the picture's flaws can be forgiven in the face of Altman's energy and vision.

The CAV portion of the supplement includes the Raymond Carver stories that inspired the film, as well as theatrical reviews (including mine). The extra CLV disc is devoted mostly to the same making-of documentary you can borrow for free from most stores that carry the movie, but you also get some interesting out-takes, and one analog track has an interview with critic Pauline Kael about Altman's career. *Short Cuts*, a landmark film, gets full justice here.

—Sol Louis Siegel

The Who: Thirty Years of Maximum R&B Live

1954. Color/B&W. Stereo. 155 min. $19.95. LD 3 sides CLV $34.95. MCA Music Video.

This is the third video documentary on the Who to show up in the last four years and, overall, the best of the lot, despite one glaring omission. Coming a year after the success of *Tommy* on Broadway, and with the CD boxed set *Thirty Years of Maximum R&B*, it includes most of the songs that have loomed large in the band's stage shows. The performances are bridged by interview segments with Pete Townshend, Roger Daltrey and John Entwistle.

As a portrait of the Who, *Maximum R&B Live* is less successful than the Jeff Stein documentary *The Kids Are Alright*, but it devotes far more of its time to performance footage, much of which (notably at Tanglewood and the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970) has not been seen before. The post-Keith Moon renditions of "I Can See For Miles" still sound like the work of a Who cover band, but this makes up less than a third of the material, and is balanced by extraordinary early footage of the band doing "So Sad About Us" from the Marquee Club in 1967, and similar gems. Producer Nick Ryle and company have done their homework, even retrieving footage of the band from a TV documentary on composer Constant Lambert, father of the band's then-manager Kit Lambert.

The quality ranges from good to excellent, and for once the producers have done the sound justice, with a loud, lively mix that captures the energy behind the group's sound. The omission is the absence of a live "Won't Get Fooled

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Again," but it seems only one performance of that signature tune was ever filmed, and it's been used on video twice before. The laserdisc version is mastered on three CLV sides that break down pretty well along historical lines.

—Bruce Eder

INTERACTIVE

Myst

1993. CD-ROM for Macintosh or Windows, $59.95. Broderbund.

Picture yourself alone on a lush, mysterious island. You have no idea why you're there or how to get out. There are no hints as to where you are or what's going on, only a scratchy video message, recorded who knows when, which implores you for help. Your sense of disorientation is overwhelming. What can you do, besides hope you wake up soon?

You set off to explore your strange new world, which is exactly what this intriguing disc wants you to do. Not so much a game as an "experience," the object of *Myst* isn't to win, but to lose—your sense of self. As you "walk" through the various tableaux, which might best be described as prehistoric science fiction, you find your consciousness operating at a dreamlike pace. Oh sure, there's an actual mystery to be solved here—something about stolen manuscripts holding deep, dark secrets. But completing the puzzle isn't the point; the object is immersion. When we say immersion, we mean it: A full "game" of *Myst* might take days, weeks or even months to complete.

Weird Scenes: Playing makes it all clear as *Myst*.

Despite the lack of immediate gratification (or maybe because of it), playing *Myst* is strangely addictive. The beautiful graphics and sound have a primal quality somewhere between Michael Powell and David Lynch. Call this game *Tetris* for the right-brain crowd.

—Ron Goldberg

Voyage Voyage: *Titanic: The Interactive Exploration* guarantees an experience more fun than the real thing.

Titantic: An Interactive Exploration

1994. CD-i disc, $49.98. Total Vision/Philips Interactive Media.

Anyone who thinks the CD-i format has been eclipsed by other, "more powerful" set-top interactive systems should run to their nearest Philips dealer and check out this extraordinary disc. *Titanic*, along with several other hot new titles produced exclusively for CD-i, proves that it's not what you've got under the hood that counts, but what you *do* with it. What Philips and Total Vision have done here is create a multimedia disc that just about everyone finds captivating, no matter what their previous level of interest in things interactive.

Titanic uses vintage video clips, thousands of photographs and paintings, survivor interviews, memoirs and more to paint a moving portrait of the ship, its era and its fateful maiden voyage. Users can explore the ship room by room, follow individual passengers through the ship's last day, even explore the wreckage finally discovered in 1985. Narrator Patrick Stewart keeps things lively with help from Walter Lord, author of the original Titanic study, *A Night to Remember*.

This disc can even lay claim to a significant technical innovation: When used on CD-i players with the add-on Digital Video cartridge, it delivers full-screen video segments; on players without the cartridge, it automatically displays the same material in small video windows, like those common to CD-ROM. There's nothing quite like compatibility.

—Ken Korman

Quantum Gate

1994. CD-ROM for MPC or Macintosh, $79.95. Mediavision.

Now that "digital" and "interactive" are so....*three weeks ago*, enter "virtual" as the frontrunner for buzzword of the moment. Here's one of the latest spins—this disc bills itself as virtual cinema, not so much a game as an interactive story, told from the player's subjective point of view. Like a movie, *Quantum Gate* has a plot, and it progresses from beginning to middle to end. But because it's interactive, the story can only unfold at a pace determined by the user. You get to be audience, director and actor, all at the same time.

The story concerns an impending ecological disaster in the near future. The U.N. has been called in to save the world, and you're part of the mission. But things aren't all they seem. As you "talk" to the other characters, you begin to have suspicions. Clue by clue, you piece together a scenario that builds to a

shocking conclusion.

Technically, the disc is outstanding, although you'll need some potent hardware to get the most out of it. Sight and sound aside, what counts is the content, and this disc has the goods with a story that's nicely written, designed and acted. Maybe it isn't really "virtual cinema," but it is an interesting new form of entertainment. **—RG**

CLASSICS

The Cowboys

1972. John Wayne, Roscoe Lee Browne, Bruce Dern, Robert Carradine, A. Martinez; dir. Mark Rydell. Surround, letterboxed. (PG) 135 min. Side 3 CAV. $39.95. Warner.

Chisum

1970. John Wayne, Forrest Tucker, Ben Johnson, Lynda Day; dir. Andrew V. McLaglen. Mono, letterboxed. (G) 112 min. 2 sides CLV. $34.95. Warner.

"It's not how you're buried—it's how they remember you," says Wil Anderson, John Wayne's character in *The Cowboys*. It looks like Wayne himself has proved the script right. When *The Cowboys* opened, it was denounced by liberal pundits for glorifying violence and doing so with teenage boys. Today, the violence seems tame and the movie, although a little sluggish, has aged well. *Chisum*, a much less controversial picture, seems less important, although it is more exciting.

Warner Bros. has done a beautiful job transferring both films, and *The Cowboys* has had its original Overture, Entr'acte and Exit Music sequences restored as well. Both movies have been letterboxed in their full 2.35:1 Panavision aspect ratios and are especially impressive on large screens.

The Cowboys casts Wayne as an aging rancher, forced to hire 11 boys to bring his herd to market when his hands take off for a gold rush. Along the way we get a richly textured tale of growing up and learning to finish a job, highlighted by fine performances and vivid characterizations. The movie resembles *The Reivers* (also by Rydell), but with more grit, and strikes a carful balance between action and narrative detail. Carradine and Martinez stand out among the young actors.

Chisum is a wistful film about a cattleman caught up in a range war. Some elements, especially Ben Johnson as Wayne's sidekick, recall *Red River* or *McLintock!* (also directed by McLaglen). Although Wayne is the star, his John Chisum is not quite the center of the action, and there is plenty of story and action, all briskly handled, even the scene where Pat Garrett meets Billy the Kid. It's all fun and exciting, if not profound. **—BE**

Hondo

1953. John Wayne, Geraldine Page, Ward Bond; dir. John Farrow. Mono. (NR) 84 min. $13.98. MPI.

Hondo, the second of four films owned by the John Wayne estate to be released on home video is long overdue, even if it's not out in its original 3-D. (The first film, issued a year ago, was *McLintock!*) For the last few years, viewers have had to content themselves with reruns of the mid-60s TV series, which was adapted from the film. John Wayne's performance is one of the most confident of his career. As Hondo Lane, a half-Indian cavalry scout caught in the middle of an oncoming war between both of his peoples, he tries to balance his responsibilities and his interest in a pretty homesteader (Page) living in the path of the hostilities. If the film lacks the power of *The Searchers*, it is not the fault of the players, but of the story's narrow scope.

Wayne's World: John Wayne is *Hondo, Chisum,* a Cowboy.

At presstime, the sound for this video edition of *Hondo* was still being mastered. But based on the quality of the sample reel provided by MPI, we can say that the reissue's color is bright, and the sharpness and detail acceptable. But we would like to see a good 3-D version of *Hondo* on video—the technology has improved since the last 3-D telecast of the film four years ago. **—BE**

SPECIAL INTEREST

High Lonesome: The Story of Bluegrass Music

1994. Bill Monroe; dir. Rachel Liebling. Mono. (NR) 95 min. VHS only, $19.95. Tara Releasing (415-454-5838).

Bluegrass music seems so timeless that it comes as a shock to learn someone actually invented this enduring style. According to writer-director Rachel Liebling's *High Lonesome: The Story of Bluegrass Music*, the credit goes to mandolin whiz Bill Monroe, who took the traditional Scotch-Irish music of Appalachia, added a shot of blues, and jacked up the tempo to create a sort of "folk-music with overdrive" that enjoyed widespared popularity in the '40s and '50s. Part history lesson, part celebration, this easygoing documentary will delight longtime fans, although casual viewers may find the pace too slow.

While focusing on Monroe, who can still play up a storm, the film also features performances and recollections of other notables, including Ralph Stanley, Jim and Jesse, Mac Wiseman, Jimmy Martin, and Sonny and Bobby Osborne. With its emphasis on acoustic string instruments, bluegrass seemed obsolete after the rise of rock 'n' roll and the electrification of mainstream country music in the latter half of the '50s; however, the subsequent folk boom and an ongoing infusion of new blood has ensured its survival. If *High Lonesome* skims over some intriguing aspects of the story, such as the relationship with black music, it's a lovely tribute nonetheless. **—JY**

Early Illusions: *Mermaids,* by magician turned movie-maker George Melies, part of *The Movies Begin.*

The Movies Begin: (A Treasury of Early Cinema 1894—1914)

1894—1914. Tinted/B&W. The Great Train Robbery & Other Primary Works, The European Pioneers, Experimentation & Discovery, The Magic of Melies, Comedy, Spectacle & New Horizons. George Melies, Max Linder and others. Various dirs. Mono. (NR) 414 min. 5 cassettes. $199.95, or $49.95 each. Kino.

This collection has been a long time coming. It was just a matter of who put it out first. However, it seems as if the "best man" won. Kino's collaboration with Film Preservation Associates and the British Film Institute has produced a mesmerizing assemblage of important "first" films. Except for the Muybridge studies, which survive beautifully on Voyager's laserdisc, great care has been taken to procure the best materials on each subject, and to present each at an appropriate frame rate. An array of musical accompaniments, from period recordings to newly performed arrangements, add variety and interest.

However, the collection is not as well organized as it might be, as several filmmakers are covered on different volumes. While this may matter little to casual buffs, it will confuse the university students for whom this set will become *the* curriculum. The colorful packaging is exquisite, with detailed notes crammed onto the sleeves and a booklet worthy of a CD for each volume, all expertly annotated by historian Charles Musser.

The Melies volume is by far the most fascinating and entertaining, establishing his artistic superiority over other producers of the period. After expericing Melies' enchanting world, you'll wish an entire set had been devoted just to his work. How 'bout it, Kino? **—BL**

Rock Hudson's Home Movies

1992. Rock Hudson, Doris Day, John Wayne; dir. Mark Rappaport. Stereo. (NR) 63 min. VHS only, $39.95. Bear.

It's a good thing *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* is only an hour long—you'll have time to watch it twice to get all the stuff you missed the first time because you were laughing so hard. Filmmaker Mark Rappaport makes the tongue-in-cheek argument that Hudson's homosexuality was obvious to attentive viewers. His evidence is this collection of clips from the star's films, introduced by Hudson himself (played by actor Eric Farr).

Although Rappaport puts the clips in context, the unaltered dialog is so hilarious that it's hard to believe Hudson and his co-stars weren't aware of the flagrant double entendres. (Check out Rock putting the make on John Wayne in 1969's *The Undefeated.*) It may sound tasteless, but Rappaport's sympathy is with gays obliged to play-act their way through life. His examination of movie morality is as incisive as it is mischievous, and the film has a strong measure of bitter irony to leaven the humor.

—M. Faust

Agatha Christie's Miss Marple

1987/89/91/92. 4 vols. Joan Hickson, Claire Bloom, Donald Pleasence; various dirs. Mono. (NR) 100 min. each. VHS $79.95 each. A&E.

Call it a reverse James Bond effect: Just as Pierce Brosnan has brought 007 to rock-bottom, the line of Jane Marples—played variously by Margaret Rutherford, Helen Hayes and Angela Lansbury—has peaked, with the BBC's excellent Joan Hickson.

Agatha Christie described her spinsterish supersleuth as "a cheerful person," but "she always expected the worst of everyone and everything, and was, with almost frightening accuracy, usually proved right." In A&E's latest Marple whodunits—"A Caribbean Mystery," "The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side," "Sleeping Murder" and "4:50 from Paddington"—our fluffy heroine indeed finds the worst. But neither the bloody corpse of an overcurious maid nor a bride's bewildering memory of a stranger throttling a blonde can faze the shrewd Miss Marple, and it's giddy fun to see the sweet old lady from St. Mary Mead rake in clues by pretending to want a recipe for gingerbread.

Alas, some may find the stories slow-moving (I prefer the term leisurely) and the star wattage a trifle dim, but *Miss Marple's* low-key approach only heightens the emphasis on character. And when the object is a motive for murder, what else do you need?

—April P. Bernard

Joan Hickson as *Miss Marple*

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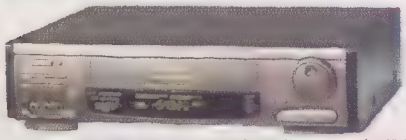

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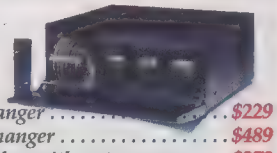

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HIGHLIGHTS

Backbeat
1994. Sheryl Lee, Stephen Dorff, Ian Hart; dir. Ian Softly. Early Hamburg days of The Fab Five—John, Paul, George, Stu and Pete. Soundtrack by the alternative supergroup culled from today's top bands. Stereo. (R) 100 min. VHS priced for rental. LD $34.95. Polygram.

Bad Girls
1994. Madeleine Stowe, Mary Stuart Masterson, Drew Barrymore, Andy MacDowell; dir. Johnathan Kaplan. Guns, poses 'n' roses. Stereo. (R) 110 min. LD letterboxed $39.98. FoxVideo.

Bitter Moon
1992. Peter Coyote, Hugh Grant, Emmanuelle Seigner; dir. Roman Polanski. Fascinated young passenger listens as wheelchair-bound novelist on luxury liner recounts intimate details concerning his beautiful young wife. Stereo. (R) 139 min. LD letterboxed $49.99. New Line.

Breakfast At Tiffany's Collector's Edition
1961. Audrey Hepburn, George Peppard, Mickey Rooney; dir. Blake Edwards. Includes 8x10 glossies, collector's brochure, CD of Henry Mancini/Johnny Mercer double Oscar-winning soundtrack and Audrey's script with her own handwritten notes on Holly Golightly!!! Mono. (NR) 114 min. VHS letterboxed $59.95. Paramount

Broadway Bill
1934. B&W. Warner Baxter, Myrna Loy, Clarence Muse; dir. Frank Capra, wr. Robert Riskin. Man gives up demanding wife, family and job to own a racehorse. Another of Capra's highly enjoyable daydreams. Mono. (NR) 104 min. VHS $19.95. LD $34.95. Paramount.

The Bells! The Bells!: Leslie Nielsen pulls some strings in *Naked Gun 33 1/3: The Final Insult*

Camera Buff
1979. Jerzy Stuhr, Maalgorzata Zabkowska, Krysztof Zanussi; dir. Krzysztof Kieslowski. Camera crazy Pole begins filming all he sees much to the consternation of communist authorities. From the director of *Blue, White* and *The Double Life of Veronique*. Mono, subtitled. (NR) 112 min. VHS only, $79.95. New Yorker.

La Caza (The Hunt)
1965. B&W. Ismael Merlo, Jose Maria Prada; dir. Carlos Saura. This film—a tale of a hunting trip filled with memories of manhunts during the Spanish Civil War—established Saura's and Spain's reputation internationally, while traditional Franco flicks played at home. Mono, subtitled. (NR) 87 min. VHS only, $59.95. Connoisseur.

Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia 3.0
1994. New version includes over 50 videos, 8 hours of sound, more than 7,000 pictures, 3-D animations, maps, 53,000 articles, and the ability to copy all of the above. MPEG-1 and speech recognition versions available late '94, Sega CD early '95. PC CD-ROM $149.95. Upgrade $49.95. Compton's NewMedia.

Fit for Sex
1994. Gil Kaan; dir. Kevin M. Glover. Workout with three nude couples to strengthen all muscles you use in love making. "The perfect prelude to foreplay". (Foreforeplay? Eightplay?) Mono. VHS only, $29.95. Bennet Video Group.

Fort Saganne
1984. Gerard Depardieu, Catherine Deneuve, Phillippe Noiret; dir. Alain Corneau. Corneau's (*All the Mornings in the World*) earlier saga is a romantic epic about heroic French legionaire Charles Saganne. Mono, subtitled. (NR) 184 min. VHS only, $89.95. Connoisseur.

Naked Gun 33 1/3: The Final Insult
1994. Leslie Nielsen, Priscilla Presley, George Kennedy, O.J. Simpson; dir. Peter Segal. *The Final Insult*: For lovers of sperm, hurl, breasts and body-cavity jokes everywhere. Stereo. (PG-13) 83 min. VHS priced for rental. Paramount.

continued on page 84

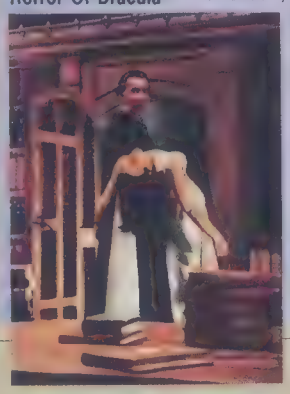
BY JOSEF KREBS

Labels For Less

It's a month of muscles and monsters. First, the muscle pics: *Last Action Hero* and *Cliffhanger* ($19.95 each) from Columbia TriStar; *Patriot Games* and *The Hunt For Red October* ($19.95 each) from Paramount; *Total Recall, Red Heat* and *The Running Man* ($9.98 each) from Live; *The Fighting Kentuckian* ($14.98) from Republic; *Demolition Man* ($19.98) from Warner; *Midnight Cowboy* and *The Adventures Of Robin Hood*, ($19.98 each) from MGM/UA.

Now for the monsters: *Candyman* and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* ($19.95 each) from Columbia Tristar; *Innocent Blood, Dracula AD 1972, Taste The Blood Of Dracula, Dracula Has Risen From The Grave, Trog, Dream Demon, Tales From The Crypt, Stephen King's It, Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* ($19.98 each), *The Lost Boys, Creepshow, The Curse Of Frankenstein, Horror Of Dracula, The Bat People, The Mummy* (1955), *Wolfen, It's Alive!, Salem's Lot* and *The Awakening* ($14.95 each) all from Warner/HBO/Cannon; *The Fearless Vampire Killers* ($19.98), *The Hunger, Child's Play* and *It! Terror from Beyond Space* ($14.95 each) all from MGM/UA. Last but perhaps tapping into your deepest subconscious fear, *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* ($12.95), also from MGM/UA. —JK

Horror Of Dracula



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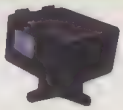

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In celebration of our **10TH ANNIVERSARY**, our tech support staff has come up with some terrific editing packages. We've matched the components that give you the maximum value to create great productions! In addition to these low prices you will receive the **10TH ANNIVERSARY PACKAGE BONUS**, a $40.00 value, at no extra charge. *For more information, or to find out what components are best for you, call today!*

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V6350

- 8 colors, 2 fonts, 4 sizes and 3 borders
- 10 pages of memory
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SCW

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A complete creative editing center with color wipes, partial wipes, inverse, reverse, crossfades etc.
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- Bypass accurately locates edit points
- Stereo sound mixer
- 2 in/ 2 out • S-VHS/Hi8 compatible

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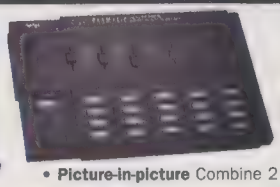

Professional Digital Effects Generator

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- **Picture-in-picture** Combine 2 video sources by adding full motion or still PIP • **Freeze Frame**
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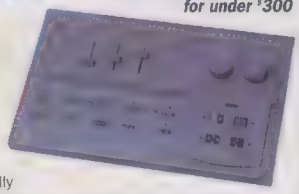

The SFX-L automatically edits your home videos with professional color fades and wipes plus audio mixing. Preprogram an Edit Decision List with up to 23 scenes.The on-screen display lists the in and out points, the special effects that have been selected and the elapsed time of your video. Perform clean cut assembly edits or choose exciting wipe patterns in 8 colors. Includes stereo audio mixer, mic, and Y/C for S-VHS/Hi8. $299.00

Also New from Sima -IR Auto Ed/it-Infrared Video Editor and Audio Mixer-One button performs the entire editing sequence automatically -assuring perfect edits every time. $179.00

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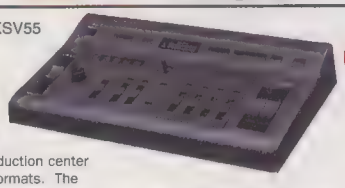
JXSV55



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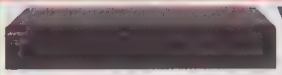

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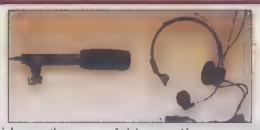

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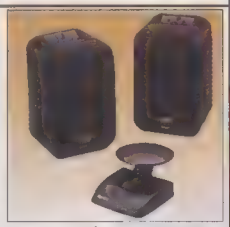

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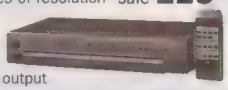

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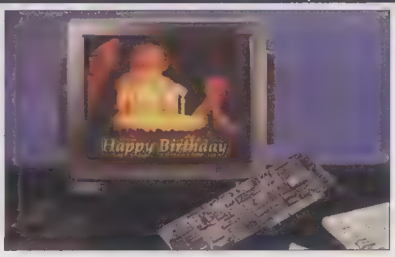

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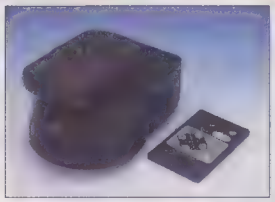

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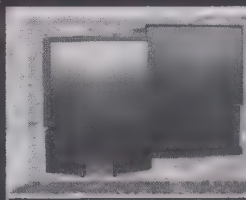

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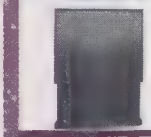

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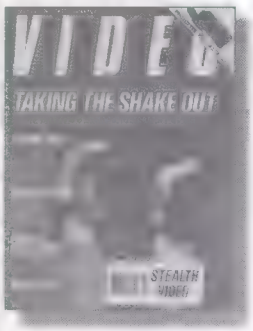

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continued from page 76

The National Pastime: A History of Baseball
1994. Five-video set celebrating 125 years of great players, records and moments. (NR) 345 min. VHS only, $69.98. Orion.

Reckless Kelly
1994. Yahoo Serious, Melora Hardin, Alexei Sayle; dir. Serious. Rock 'n' roll robber's island hideout is up for sale to Japanese investors. How can an outlaw legend raise the money to outbid them? Kelly goes to Hollywood. Surround. (PG) 81 min. VHS priced for rental. Warner.

The Cat People
1942. B&W. Simone Simon, Kent Smith, Tom Conway; dir. Jacques Tourneur. Includes audio commentary, trailers by producer and stylistic influence Val Lewton, and stills collection. Mono. (NR) 73 min. LD $49.95. Criterion.

Way Down East
1920. B&W. Lillian Gish, Richard Barthelmess; dir. D.W. Griffith. Epic melodrama culminating in a thrilling ice flow sequence. Restored to its original length, edition includes original program guide, stage play, stills and short—*Child of the Ghetto* (1910). Mono. (NR) 149 min. LD $69.99. David Shepard.

Star Wars: Rebel Assault
1994. PC CD-ROM title comes to Sega CD platform (the 5th Star Wars title.) 3-D space combat (including the infamous trench run) incorporates scaling and rotational graphics, full motion 3-D movie sequences and speech. $50. JVC.

Two Small Bodies
1994. Suzy Amis, Fred Ward; dir. Beth B. Beth B. goes mainstream with a tale of the obsessive attraction between a cop and the strip joint hostess he is interrogating in a murder case. Mono. (NR) 85 min. VHS only $89.98. Fox Lorber.

Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music (The Director's Cut)
1994. Dir. Michael Wadleigh. Director's cut includes 40 minutes of never-before-seen footage of Canned Heat, The Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix. Stereo. (R) 225 min. VHS $29.98. LD $49.98. Warner.

Woodstock: The 25th Anniversay CD-ROM
1994. Includes the music, behind the scenes interviews, where-are-they-nows of the Woodstock performers, archival photos, "'60s inspired individually customizable" psychedelic graphics, etc. $39.95. Time Warner Interactive Group.

LASERDISC

Beckett
1964. Peter O'Toole, Richard Burton, John Gielgud; dir. Peter Glenville. Friends fall out when, on being appointed Archbishop, Thomas a Beckett transfers his loyalty from King Henry II to another authority. Mono. (NR) 150 min. LD letterboxed $39.98. MPI.

Blood on the Moon
1948. B&W. Robert Mitchum, Barbara Bel Geddes, Walter Brennan, Robert Preston; dir. Robert Wise. Laserdisc debut for this visually striking western includes audio commentary by Wise and supplemental materials. Mono. (NR) 88 min. LD $39.99. Turner.

The Bounty
1984. Mel Gibson, Anthony Hopkins, Daniel Day-Lewis, Liam Neeson; dir. Roger Donaldson. A chance to see a cast of actors who have each grown immensely in fame and statu : since appearing together in this film. Stereo. (PG) 130 min. LD letterboxed $49.99. Orion.

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid 25th Anniversary Special Edition
1969. Paul Newman, Robert Redford; dir. George Roy Hill. Includes production materials and interviews with Hill, cinematographer Conrad Hall and writer William Goldman. Mono. (PG) 110 min. LD letterboxed $99.98. FoxVideo.

DRAMA

Against the Wall
1994. Kyle MacLachlan, Samuel L. Jackson; dir. John Frankenheimer. Good guard is

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caught in the middle of bloody Attica State Prison rebellion against brutality of his colleagues. Stereo. (R) 111 min. VHS priced for rental. HBO.

Lush Life
1994. Jeff Goldblum, Forest Whitaker, Kathy Baker; dir. Michael Elias. Jazz musician must deal with the problems his erratic ways and lifestyle create in his marriage and friendship with fellow jazz player. Stereo. (R) 96 min. VHS priced for rental. Columbia TriStar.

The Migrants
1973. Cloris Leachman, Ron Howard, Sissy Spacek. Family of field workers struggle to live the American dream. From a story by Tennessee Williams. Mono. (NR) 83 min. VHS only, $89.95. Monterey.

SPECIAL INTEREST

Fidelio
1990. Gabriela Benacnova, Josef Protschka, Neill Archer. Beethoven's opera on man's striving for freedom from oppression through love, recorded live in Covent Garden with the Royal Opera House Orchestra. Stereo, subtitled. (NR) 150 min. LD $59.95. Pioneer Classics.

Geo Kids
1994. Dir. Hank Saroyan. Series of shows to teach ages one to five about the world using songs, rhymes, stories and incorporated wildlife footage Stereo. (NR) 33 min. each cassette. VHS $12.95 each cassette. National Geographic.

Morning Sickness: All Day and All Night
1994. Hosted by Liz Weiss. Miriam Erick, M.S., R.D., obstetrical dietician, tells how to relieve the symptoms 90 percent of pregnant women suffer. (NR) 30 min. VHS only, $19.95. LemonAid Films (800-540-6400).

The Thunderbirds
1966. Jeff Tracy, five sons, Brains, Lady Penelope, Parker, Tin-Tin, Kyrano, Grandma; dir. Gerry Anderson. Thunderbirds are go(!) as International Rescue battles to save members of mankind from disaster and the evil plots of the very bushy-eyebrowed Hood. Mono. (NR) 25 min. each episode. VHS only, $9.95 each episode. PolyGram. ■

LOOP

continued from page 59

DT-3660 uses a progressive-scan, double-line addressing system to produce an image without visible scan lines, and it offers an RGB input that can be used to display computer graphics. There are three color temperature settings: 6,500, 9,300 and 11,000 Kelvin. (We're *begging* for a review sample!)

Zenith held forth in the Drake Hotel with the first TVs to incorporate StarSight, an onscreen program directory service transmitted on the vertical blanking interval of PBS stations. StarSight gives you the name, time, length and description of every available program, lists them by time or category, and lets you record them automatically by highlighting a program on the menu and pushing the record button. At the appropriate time, the TV sends an infrared command to your VCR. The sets range in size from 27 to 60 inches. StarSight TVs command about a $50 premium over conventional sets; you also pay a monthly subscription fee for the service.

Sony used its Michigan Avenue showroom to display several fascinating new products, including the CCD-TR400 and CCD-FX730V camcorders (see this issue's "Videotests" and "New Products," respectively). Sony's TV division showed a remarkable new pair of headphones that make you forget you're wearing headphones. They use an unusual open-air design with the drivers held away from the listener's ears by about an inch. The headphones have an internal gyroscope that tracks head movement, and changes the balance between the two drivers to simulate the effect you get when you turn your head while listening to free-standing speakers. The base unit for the headphones also incorporates effective DSP-based surround-sound modes. We broke out in laughter when we first tried them—it really does sound like you're listening to free-standing stereo speakers!

HOME THEATER

As usual, the Chicago Hilton was filled with (mostly) great-sounding systems. The majority included only new music-oriented components, including promising new speakers like Thiel's CS7 and Vandersteen's model 4. But hidden amongst the stereo suites were several impressive home theater demos.

Most prominent was Marantz's demo of its new $1,100 THX processor, with Snell THX speakers, a Runco datagrade projector (calibrated by Joe Kane, who is featured in this month's "Home Theater" column), a D-1 VTR and a Marantz LV-510 laserdisc player feeding a Faroudja line doubler. The picture was probably the best of the show, and the program material was especially outstanding, including the anamorphic laserdisc of *Free Willy* that comes with Toshiba widescreen TVs.

Definitive Technology showed its new, nice-sounding Celsius minimonitor-style speakers, and a home theater demo using two of its new PowerField 1800 subwoofers, each of which uses an 18-inch driver. The bass was intense enough to make you queasy, but never sluggish or mushy, as many speakers with such large drivers can be. (A PowerField 1800 is now shaking the floor in our home theater room; watch our "Hands On" column for a full report.)

Perhaps the most esoteric demo of the show used a Vidikron HPF40 datagrade projector fed by a JVC W-VHS HDTV VCR, now offered for sale by Captain of America for about $10,000. The sound came from Martin-Logan electrostatic speakers, with an electrostatic center speaker that bore a striking resemblance to a radar antenna.

The audio system was fed by EAD's TheaterMaster, a combination digital-to-analog convertor and surround sound processor. The TheaterMaster offers six analog inputs, six digital inputs (two coaxial, two AT&T ST and two Toslink), unbalanced outputs for center, surround and subwoofer channels, and balanced and unbalanced outputs for the left and right channels. Surround-sound decoding is fully digital, and EAD says the TheaterMaster will be upgradeable to Dolby AC-3 or DTS when those systems are available. The company will soon offer a compatible video switcher.

Counterpoint is making big strides in home theater, both in speakers and electronics. The company showed a new surround-sound decoder with sophisticated multiroom control capability, and a speaker system that combines THX-certified dipole surround speakers with conventional, non-THX two-way front speakers—in our opinion, the perfect combination for a versatile home entertainment system.

At its showroom, Sony showed prototypes of two new ES-series A/V receivers, the STR-GX800ES and the STR-GX900ES, with amplifiers that borrow many design traits (like stiff, well-regulated power supplies and short signal paths) from high-end amplifiers. If the receivers sound half as good as Sony claims, they'll be a steal—they list for $700 and $850, respectively.

The best sound of the show was to be found in a private suite at the Printer's Row Hyatt, where British manufacturer Meridian showed two new digital home theater systems. The flagship system costs about $29,000, and it's worth every penny—it uses unusual digital speakers with D/A convertors, preamps and amplifiers built in, and Meridian's new THX-certified surround decoder. Everyone we talked to who heard the system was absolutely thrilled with the sound. Surprisingly, there were no video monitors present—Meridian chose to demo the system with music, some of which was surround-encoded. We hit the Meridian suite last thing, right before we left for the airport, and wished we could have stayed a *lot* longer. ■

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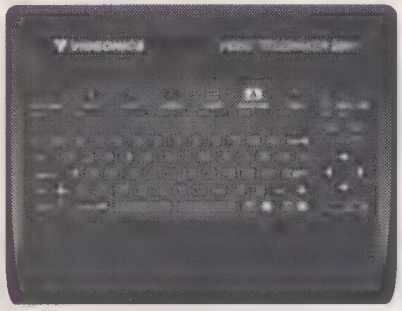

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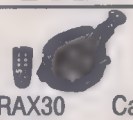

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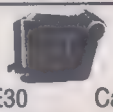

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FIRST LOOK

continued from page 50

VCR and a laserdisc player.

When you first get the dish and receiver set up, all you see onscreen is DirecTv's previews and a USSB information channel. To activate your service, just call DirecTv and/or USSB and give them your name, Access Card number, etc. It took only minutes for our services to be activated, although as DSS takes off, it might take longer.

DSS PICTURE

For me, the most important aspect of a video product is its performance. Here, DSS gets a good—but not glowing—review. The MPEG-1 you see on DSS produces a far better picture than what you see on Video CDs. The picture looks almost noise-free, with none of the blocking effects seen in dark shots on Video CDs. Occasionally, there's a missed frame, so you get a very brief still-frame effect. We've heard reports of digital artifacts sometimes occurring when a shot changes, but we didn't notice such a problem. The resolution seems to vary from program to program, and even from shot to shot. At best, it looks like a very good NTSC broadcast. At worst, it looks softer than VHS. I was very impressed with the MPEG encoding on some movies, especially *Tombstone* and *Geronimo: An American Legend*, but was disappointed on some other programs. Comments from others in the office varied with the program material—some walked in during a good scene and were amazed by the clarity, others saw lower-quality encodings and commented that the picture looked fuzzy.

There was also a mild lack of contrast, a washing-out effect I've often seen with digitized video. This sometimes made it difficult to arrive at satisfactory contrast and brightness settings.

DSS SOUND

The sound was absolutely fabulous, *way* better than I've experienced from cable or terrestrial broadcast. Although it, too, is compressed, I noticed no significant coloration or distortion—technically, it's not "CD-quality," but it's close enough for me. The extraordinary channel separation (probably 90 to 100 decibels, in the same range as laserdisc players) was a big plus on movies with surround sound—the surround effects seemed as realistic as with laserdisc. (Channel separation on standard MTS TV tuners is only about 30 decibels at best, which is why the surround effects on TV shows are seldom dramatic.)

Reception was consistent from channel to channel, with no interference whatsoever. However, rain can have an effect on reception. I watched DSS during two moderate thunderstorms, and though the initial, light rain didn't affect reception, as the rain grew more intense and thunder began, three reception glitches appeared.

The first, and least severe, was missed frames—the picture would freeze for a split-second, then pick up again. The second was a sort of digital breakup—the picture would fragment horizontally, sometimes placing green rectangles onscreen. The third and worst occurred only once—the picture disappeared entirely for about two minutes as the receiver displayed the onscreen message, "Searching for satellite signal."

Note that our offices are near the eastern edge of the DSS reception area. I was able to get 80-percent signal strength under ideal conditions, which is good, but not good enough to prevent weather interference. In areas nearer the center of the U.S. or further south, reception problems might diminish.

Overall, I found DSS an acceptable source device for a home theater. I'd like to see DirecTv and USSB get MPEG-2 encoding, in which case the picture would probably be of laserdisc quality. And I'd like to see the reception problems fixed. (We've heard rumors that Hughes is working on the problem from the transmission end.) But if I were in an area where I couldn't get cable, I'd almost certainly get DSS. ■

HOW TO CHOOSE

continued from page 55

PRIMESTAR PACKAGES

Primestar doesn't set uniform package prices for the cable companies that distribute its service, but here's a representative example, using the prices Time Warner cablers set for Primestar programs.

The Economy Pak, for $29.95, is a 30-channel service that includes the Cartoon Network, CNN, C-Span, the Discovery and Family Channels, Headline News, the Learning Channel, Prevue, Prime Audio (six CD-quality music channels), Prime Sports Network (14 regional sports channels), TBS, TNT, USA and, where available, network stations for ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC and PBS.

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The 11 channels of PrimeCinema offer hit pay-per-view movies (for $4 to $5) plus special events. Also available are personal computer-based X*Press Change and X*Press Executive services, which access news, stock quotes, sports, weather and entertainment information.

A notable Primestar program advantage over DSS is the 15-channel Megasports package, which gives fanatics access to sports channels across the country covering amateur, farm league and professional events. The most gnawing gap is Primestar's lack of Viacom programs. It also has an inferior on-screen guide. However, Primestar subscribers receive a free printed guide each month, while *Satellite Direct* for DSS programs costs extra. Parental lock-out capabilities are about equal for the competing services. —**JT**

TOYS 'R' ART

continued from page 62

was relatively soft. As the yen rose in value, the camcorder lost its margin of profitability (and appeal) for Fisher-Price. In addition, Fisher-Price, like other companies, was experiencing the recessionary pressures of the late '80s. Production ceased at 400,000 units.

In the years since, Wickstead has designed an updated version of the PXL-2000, although his efforts to revive the concept have been been frustrated at every turn. Rumors among videomakers of a color pixelcorder are unfounded—a big part of Wickstead's point with the original was to "keep it simple, stupid." Wickstead says color would require a special CCD and format, making it significantly more expensive. Wickstead says his new prototype will record more image time on an audio tape by taking advantage of better data compression techniques, and will run longer on a set of six AA batteries.

Wickstead feels his best chance is to find an Asian manufacturer with (pixel) vision, and that his best chance may lie in China. Given China's official policy of one child per family, its reputation for indulging children, and the exploding private economy, Wickstead feels that China could not only manufacture a new pixelcorder, but serve as a vast new market, with untold thousands of kids exploring a pixelated world.

Wickstead also believes his camcorder is a better alternative for children than video games, because it gives kids a chance to interact genuinely with the world. In this vein, Cocteau also once said that we should give children "a portable camera and forbid them to observe any rules except those they invent for themselves...let them write without being afraid of making spelling mistakes."

LOW RES, HIGH ART

Certainly more people will be hearing about the PXL-2000 as time goes on. This October, the New York Video Festival at Lincoln Center, which runs parallel to the prestigous New York Film Festival, will highlight works made with the PXL-2000. There's even a video festival devoted exclusively to pixelvision. PXL-2000 video artist Gerry Fialka of Venice, California has shepherded the PXL THIS festival since its inception in 1991. The event, which typically plays to packed houses, is usually spread across two sets of screenings in Los Angeles. This time around, the screenings will be in November and next February. The programs include tapes from around North America in documentary, experimental, drama and music categories. Fialka says he's received about 150 entries from U.S.-based pixel artists since starting the festival. "The really creative artist does a lot with nothing," says Fialka. "People think they have to be mock-Steven Spielberg to succeed. PXL proves them wrong."

Why care about an extinct camcorder? Because it's more than simply an example of one low-tech David taking on the camcorder Goliaths. Big electronics companies constantly vie for the honor of producing camcorders with the highest resolution image and the greatest number of features for the lowest possible prices. The PXL-2000 doesn't travel in these circles. This is a camcorder that revels in its low-tech character.

Erika Suderberg, writing in *International Documentary* magazine, called the PXL-2000 "a magic toy that restores a certain human vitality to the overpowering technology of video." In the process of creating an intriguing image with simple means, the PXL-2000 re-emphasizes what we *do* with a camcorder, rather than the number of features we're packing. I hope Wickstead persists, overcoming doubters, and brings back this brilliant cinematic pencil and paper. ■

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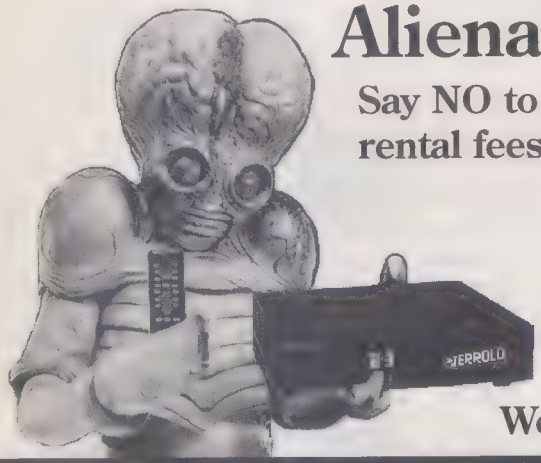

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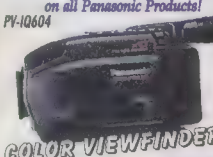

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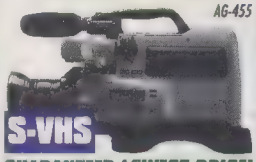

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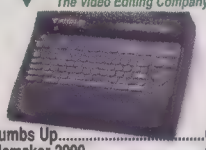

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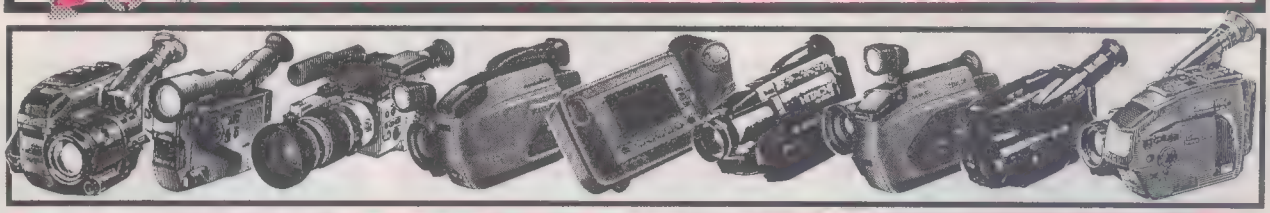

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HR-S6900	S-VHS, VCR+

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HR-VP412	*New!* 4 Hd • VCR+
HR-VP606	VCR+ • Jog/Shuttle
HR-VP612	*New!* Hi-Fi • Jog
HR-VP618	*New!* 4-Hd, Hi-Fi
HR-VP710	4 Hd, Hi-Fi, FEH

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JX-S300	AV Selector
JX-S700	AV Selector
JX-SV55	Video Editing Process.

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RX-715 VTN	Dolby® ProLogic
RX-515 VTN	Dolby® ProLog
XL-509 TN	6+1 Remote LCD
XL-F211 TN	5 CD Carousel
XL-F211 TN	5 CD Carousel
XL-MC100	100 CD Auto Chngr
TD-W709 TN	Dual A/R Cass.
TD-W309 TN	Dual A/R Cass.
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MA-3 Karaoke Adapter

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VM-E55A	**Rated #1**
VM-E56A	16x, E.I.S.
VM-E58A	16x, E.I.S.
VM-H57A	HI-8, E.I.S.
VM-H59A	HI-8, E.I.S., CLVF
VM-H71A	HI8,Wthr Resist.

VHS CAMCORDERS

VM-1700	June availability
VM-2700	*New!* 12x Zoom
VM-S8200A	Super-VHS
VM-3700	*New!* Color View.

VIDEO RECORDERS

VT-M181	Easy Guide Menu
VT-M281	4 Head
VT-M284	*New!* 4 Head
VT-F380	*New!* 4 Head, Hi-fi
VT-F381	4 Hd. Hi-Fi. VCR+
VT-F382	*New!* 4 Head, Hi-fi
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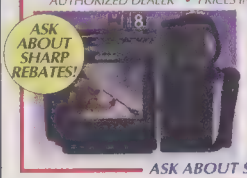

8mm CAMCORDERS

VL-E30	3" LCD Monitor
VL-E40	4" LCD Monitor

HI-8 CAMCORDERS

VL-H400U	HI8, Hi-Fi, 4" LCD

VHS CAMCORDERS

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CC-547	24x, Color View

VHS-C CAMCORDERS

CC-190	Digital Stabilizer
CC-603	12x Zoom
CC-604	12x, Color Viewfndr.

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VR-503	*New!* 4 Head
VR-538	*New!* 4 Hd. VCR+
VR-603HF	*New!* 4 Hd. Hi-Fi
VR-610HF	*New!* 4 Hd. Hi-Fi
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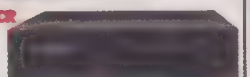

Also Available: VHS-VHS Dual Deck VCRs GV-8020Z

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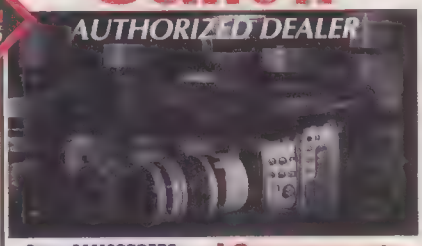

8mm CAMCORDERS

ES70	*New!* 12x zoom
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A1 Digital	HI-8, 10x Zm.
L2	RC Time Code

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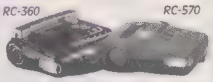
RV-311	



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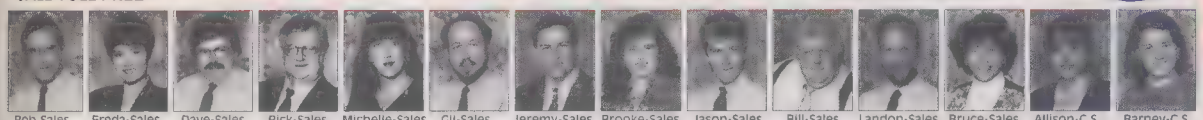
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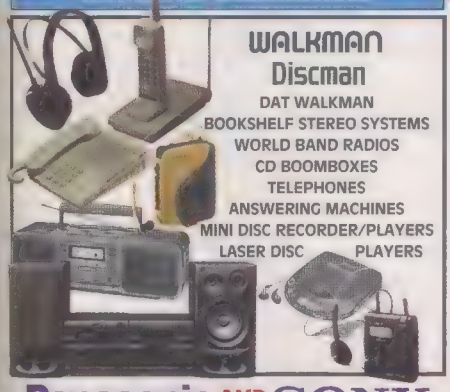

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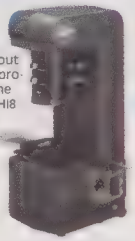

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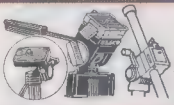

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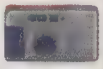

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GR-AX30 · GR-SZ7
GR-AX37

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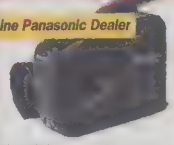

IQ-204
VHS-C •1 Lux •10x Zoom

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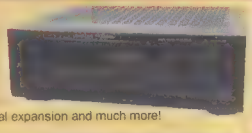

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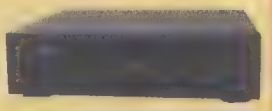

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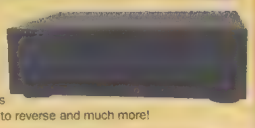

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Hitachi Projection TV
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46UX16B · 50UX19K
46UX17K · 55EX7K
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JVC

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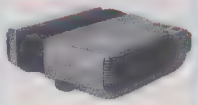

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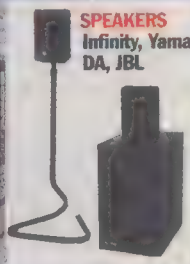

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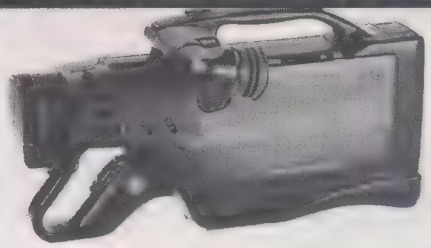

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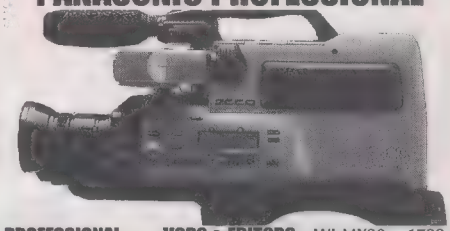

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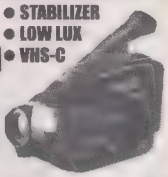

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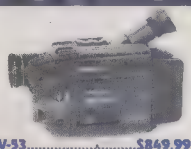

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3. How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?
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4. Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?
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61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75
76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
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WIRE STRAITS

continued from page 67

two grades in the THX series, the deluxe Interlink 406HT for $150/meter/sextet and the budget Interlink 206HT for $100/meter/sextet.

As for my own home theater rig, I use my favorite budget audiophile interconnect, Kimber's PBJ at $69/meter/pair. The Kimber is by far the best-sounding budget cable I've heard to date, but being a braided cable rather than fully shielded (like the other cables noted here), it can pick up excessive noise and hum in extremely high-interference environments.

In my system, I get absolutely noise-free performance with PBJ, but you should audition the PBJ in your own system to make sure it's compatible with your installation. In fact, whenever possible, you should try before you buy—most high-end audio/video stores will offer you the chance to try cables out at home before purchase.

• *Speaker Cable.* Here's where the Ol' Rotgut crowd will tell you to just go down to your local Hardware Hut and get the cheapest lamp cord it carries, preferably some corroded nickel-a-foot stuff that's been sitting there on a dusty spool in the corner since World War II. Again, they're dead wrong—in fact, the cable link between amplifier and speaker is probably the most critical one in your entire system, and if you can only afford to upgrade one link in the chain right now, let it be speaker cable.

Make sure that the gauge (conductor thickness) of the cable is sufficient for the length you plan on running. For short runs of under 10 feet, 16 gauge will be fine. For longer runs, use 14 gauge or even 12 gauge (the smaller the gauge number, the thicker the wire—don't ask) to ensure a low resistance link between your amps and speakers.

I know of several fine examples of good-sounding, heavy-gauge, audiophile-grade speaker cable suitable for home theater use. Audioquest's $2.25/foot Type 4 is a terrific budget audiophile speaker cable I've used successfully in several installations, but it is rather stiff, so you should limit its use to systems that won't be changed around a lot. Audioquest also offers two UL CL-3 rated in-wall cables, the $1.75/foot RI-1404 and the $1.25/foot RI-1604 for shorter runs.

Monster's THX series includes both deluxe and budget five-channel speaker cables, with the front three channels carried on one cable group and the two surround channels carried on another. The deluxe three-channel XPHP 3F HT 500 (Monster really goes in for simple, easy-to-remember names) retails for $3/foot, and the companion two-channel XPHP 25 500 for the surround speakers is $2/foot. Monster also offers a single-channel version for subwoofer hookup, the $1.25/foot MC SW HT 500, which is also the name of Onyx's lead rapper. The budget Monster THX cable consists of the three-channel XP 3F HT 500 at $1.50/foot and the two-channel XP 2F HT 500 at $1/foot.

Per THX spec, these cables are all marked with maximum run lengths, so if you're a do-it-yourselfer who buys cable in bulk, you don't have to guess how far it's safe to run the wire. And as with Monster's THX-approved interconnects, they're are all color-coded to help you keep track of them throughout an installation.

In my own home theater rig, I stick with Kimber—its $4/foot 4TC remains my favorite affordable audiophile speaker cable, and it sounds killer reproducing my fave laserdiscs. One of the shared traits of the whole Kimber line is outstandingly powerful bass, so these cables are a natural when used between a subwoofer and its amplifier. Kimber also has a couple of budget speaker cables, the $2.50/foot 4VS and $1.50/foot 4PR, that preserve much of the 4TC's performance for less green.

If movie studios, networks and other production houses go to the expense and trouble of using high-quality cables to ensure their product is delivered intact, it only makes sense to continue the chain and clean up your own system's wiring. While it may seem odd at first to spend a few hundred dollars to replace the cables you got for free with all your gear, the expense is well worth it when you sit down to see and hear your system for the first time linked together with high-quality cables. Those Cutty Sark commercials never looked and sounded so good! ■

SECOND OPINION

continued from page 67

mance. For our audio cable tests, I knew the cables' identities, Lance didn't. Even though we didn't confer during the tests, our comments were almost identical.

For speaker cables, we tried four eight-foot pairs: Straightwire's $580 Maestro, XLO's $162 ER-12 and $58 ER-14, and relatively inexpensive Monster cables that cost about a buck a foot. In both systems, the Maestro sounded very delicate and detailed, but too polite for our taste. The Monster cable changed character; it sounded fatiguingly bright and edgy with the real-world system, too dull with the high-end system. The ER-14 (intended for surround speakers) had an edgy sound in both systems. Surprisingly, it sounded unpleasant in the real-world system, but blended perfectly with the high-end stuff. Our overall favorite was the ER-12, which produced excellent soundstaging and a perfect balance with either system—to me, it would be worth $162.

I tested one-meter interconnects myself: Monster's $40 Interlink 400, XLO's $275 Type 1 and $50 Pro 150, Canare's L-4E6S Star Quad (about 85 cents a foot, which I terminated with $5/pair Canare plugs) and generic cables. The differences were less dramatic than with the speaker cables, and the sound didn't vary as much between systems. For me, the Pro 150, Star Quad and Interlink 400 sounded similar and struck the best balance of qualities, with the Type 1 offering more detail and subtlety but a thinner balance, and the generic cable producing an edgy top end that actually sounded rather gutsy and pleasing, although I probably would have found it fatiguing after a while. I've been making cables from Star Quad for a year, and I think I'll stick with it.

We second Corey Greenberg's opinion that high-quality cables can make a difference. Well-made video cables give you advantages that are worth spending more for, but don't go nuts—blowing big bucks here probably won't pay off. The right audio cables can definitely improve your sound. The most expensive ones we tested improved the reproduction of subtle nuances, although for us, they created a less-pleasing tonal balance; and the others generally outperformed cheap cable. Your best bet is to borrow a couple of pairs from a local high-end A/V dealer and try them in your system. If the difference is worth the money to you (it is to us, within reason), get the good stuff. **—Brent Butterworth**

TECH TIP

Moisture rap

To avoid the accumulation of dew when you have finished shooting for the day in tropical climates, wrap the camcorder in a heavy towel to keep the ambient (hotel) air out. Store the camcorder like this in a closet to keep cold air from blowing on the bundle. I used this method in Australia and it worked perfectly.

Robert Raiff,
Kenmore, New York

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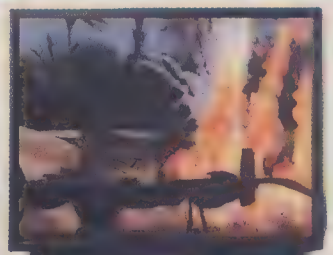

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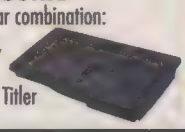

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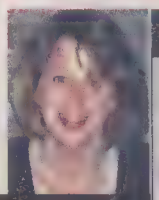

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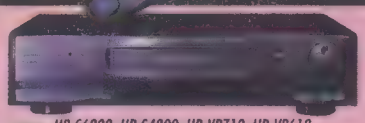

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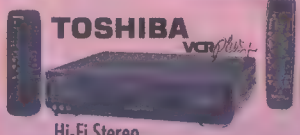

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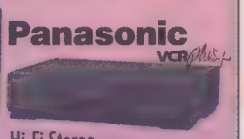

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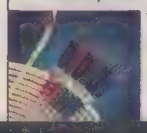

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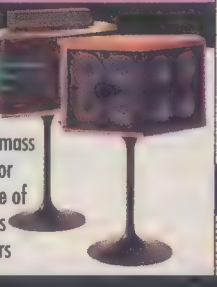

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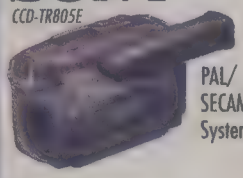

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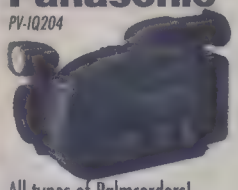

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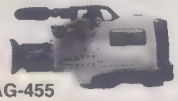

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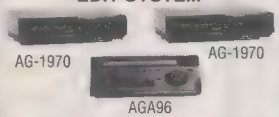

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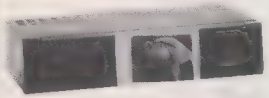

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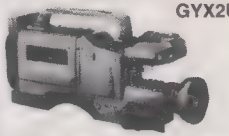

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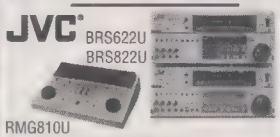

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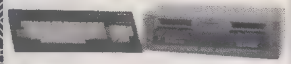

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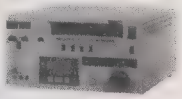

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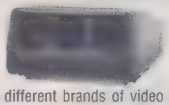

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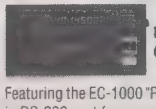

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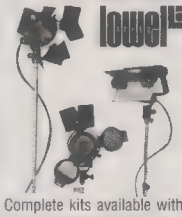

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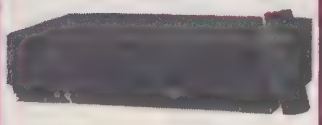

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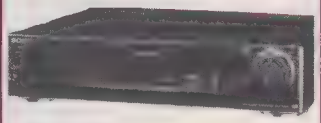

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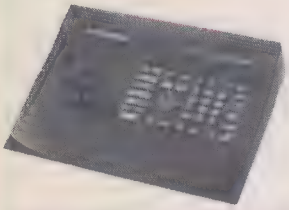

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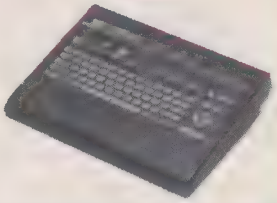

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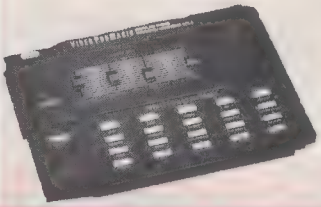

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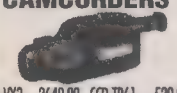

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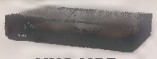

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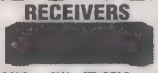

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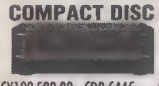

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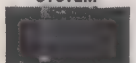

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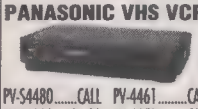

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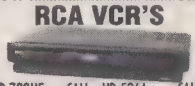

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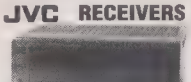

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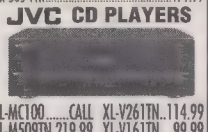

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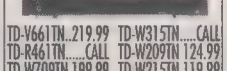

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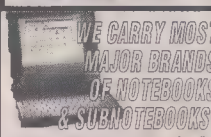

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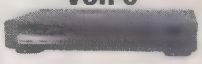

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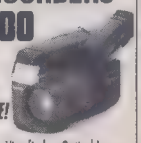

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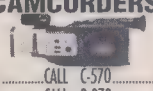

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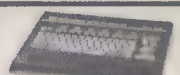

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HOME THEATER

continued from page 28

typical *Full House* fan obviously won't.

A temporary solution is to crank up the brightness and contrast when watching in bright ambient light. A better solution would be for manufacturers to put a 6,500-Kelvin option in sets with switchable color temperature. A couple of manufacturers already do this, but the results so far have been mixed.

The problem is that there's only so much range of adjustment a manufacturer can put into its onscreen menus or control knobs. To hit the very high average picture levels and high color temperatures needed to compete on a brightly lit sales floor, manufacturers often end up making it impossible to drop down to 6,500 Kelvin at all, much less to maintain it at all signal levels. And phosphors that maintain consistent color at high color temperatures may not perform so well at 6,500.

Many manufacturers have heard Kane's message and are responding positively. ProScan, Toshiba and Mitsubishi are obvious examples; now Proton offers factory calibration by an ISF-trained technician for an additional $175 per set, field report included.

Overall, the ISF's program represents a big advance in video, even though the ISF is really just following the rules that were set back in the '50s. Here's hoping Kane's efforts will re-establish the NTSC standards in the TV manufacturing industry and help us all see the best possible picture. ■

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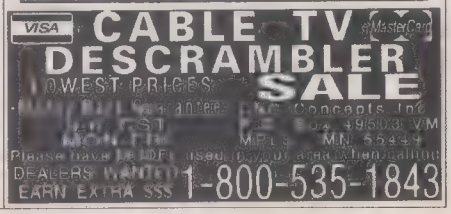

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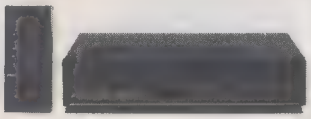

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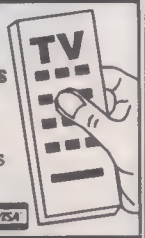

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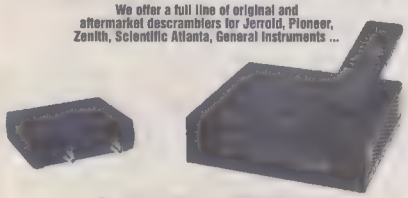

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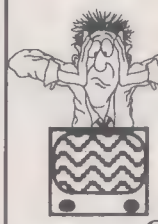

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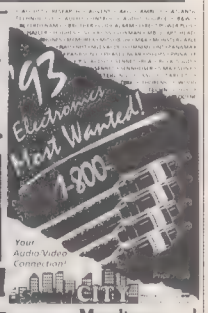

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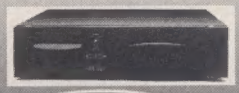

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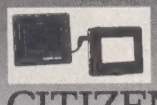

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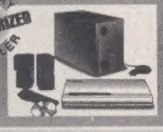

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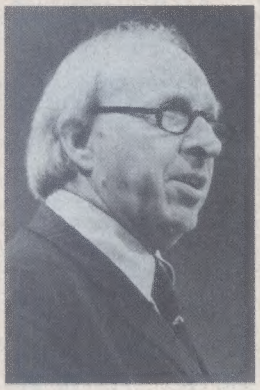
BY FRANK BEACHAM

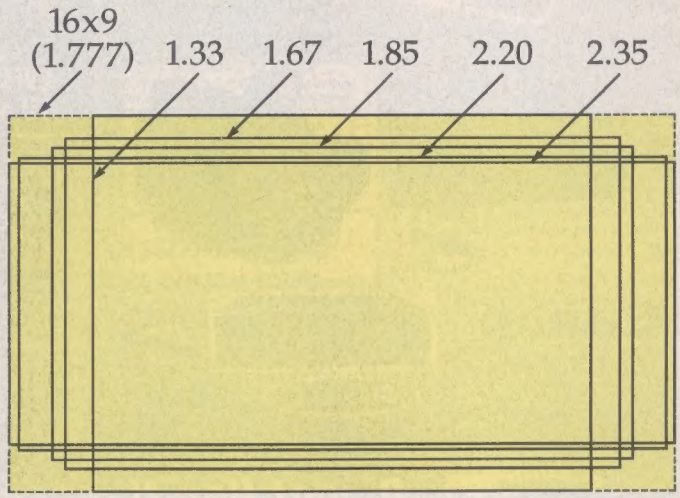
Kerns Powers and the birth of widescreen video

"The solution was kind of obvious," recalled Kerns H. Powers. "Shoot the outer to protect the inner." Of course, the solution had only seemed obvious after the fact, and then only to Powers.

You've probably never heard of Kerns Powers of Princeton, New Jersey. But you've surely seen the fruits of his work. Now 69 and retired, Powers is an unassuming engineer who holds more than a dozen patents as well as a technical achievement Emmy. In the '80s, he was research manager for TV communications at the David Sarnoff Research Center at RCA Labs and 10 years ago, during his tenure, he became the man who invented the widescreen aspect ratio adopted for high-definition video.

The Father Of 16:9: Kerns Powers and the diagram that helped him formulate the 16:9 ratio.





The format makes it possible to preserve the look of widescreen movies on TV, and has become an integral element of the HDTV standard nearing completion by the coalition of companies known as the Grand Alliance. Powers' discovery of the 16:9 format cut through a kind of Gordian Knot composed of all the other widescreen formats in which movies were shot, and led to a consensus at a critical time over an issue that might otherwise have exploded into controversy.

The story of the 16:9 TV standard goes back to 1984, when the new medium of high-definition video was being touted as an electronic replacement for film in movie theaters. Hollywood was skeptical about its feasibility as a movie-making medium, as it still is. However, it decided to take a closer look, and the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers established a body to set standards for the emerging medium.

The Working Group on High-Definition Electronic Production, as the committee was known, recruited members from both television and motion picture circles. It soon began to focus on a variety of technical parameters, including frame rate, the number of scan lines, colorimetry and gamma. Aspect ratio, in particular, was a sticking point. "Each of us was focused on a favorite aspect ratio," recalls Larry Thorpe, a member of the group and now Sony's top HDTV executive in the U.S. "The film people liked variations, wanting to retain their freedom to shoot in different aspect ratios. We argued that we don't have that freedom in television."

Enter Kerns Powers, "a real heavyweight" in Thorpe's recollections. Powers listened to the TV and film engineers and thought there must be a way to create an aspect ratio for shooting in video that could be masked inside the camera in such a way that movies could still be shot in popular widescreen formats.

Using little more than a pencil and paper, Powers began drawing rectangles with the proportions of popular aspect ratios. He laid the rectangles on a common center, one on top of the other, and normalized them to an equal area. When he finished drawing the rectangles, he discovered the image he created had revealed an intriguing result.

All the rectangles were contained within an outer rectangle, which Powers called the aperture, that had an aspect ratio of 1.77:1, the equivalent of a 16:9 aspect ratio. The edges of the rectangles also fell outside an inner rectangle, which Powers called the reticle, that had an identical 16:9 ratio. Powers realized he had the makings of a shoot-and-protect scheme in which both the larger exposed area and the inner reticle possessed the same wide formats. With the proper masks, he reasoned this shape would permit motion pictures to be released in any aspect ratio from 1.33:1 to 2.35:1.

Before presenting his finding to the working group, Powers arranged an informal dinner in Las Vegas with "four or five of the real players." The occasion was the 1984 convention of the National Association of Broadcasters. "Over dinner, I handed them this little picture," he said. "To everyone that saw it, it was like a light bulb switching on."

The next month, in Los Angeles, Powers showed his drawing to the working group. Immediately, he won them over. The group voted unanimously to accept the 16:9 aspect ratio as the new standard for HDTV production.

Ironically, the committee was not looking at the 16:9 ratio as a display format for films on HDTV monitors, which is its primary use today. "It was about the electronic shooting of movies," said Powers. "That's where the emphasis was." Now a decade later, there's little talk about high-definition video replacing film as a movie-making medium. However, there is much talk about using high-definition signals to deliver movies to homes.

As to Powers, Thorpe gives him a lot of the credit. "Quite honestly, I don't think we were smart enough to sit back and think about aspect ratio like Kerns did," said Thorpe. "It was very simple, but that was the genius of Kerns. He looked at what he had, put it on paper and tried to find something that would work. Suddenly 16:9 fell out." ■

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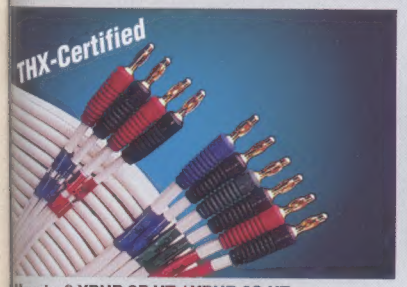

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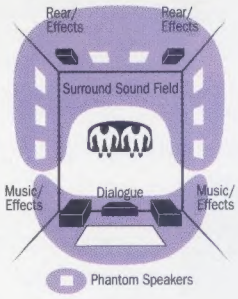

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